

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT POLICY



Disclaimer

This document has been produced by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and may be used by recipients only in the performance of their official duties. Its contents may not otherwise be disclosed without authorization of IsDB. The views expressed in this document do not imply any judgment or views on the part of IsDB or its member countries concerning the legal status of any territory or the endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries and information. The data and information provided in this document have been prepared from available sources and references to the origin of the data are provided where possible. IsDB cannot be held liable for the accuracy, completeness and correctness of the data and information.

A complete list of references used in the formulation of the Policy can be found in the Policy Study.

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Abbreviations..... | iv |
| Purpose and Objective..... | 1 |
| Definitions..... | 3 |
| Policy Scope..... | 4 |
| Guiding Principles..... | 4 |
| Roles and Responsibilities..... | 11 |
| Related Documents..... | 12 |
| Version History..... | 12 |



Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------|---|
| CSI | Core Sector Indicator |
| GDI | Gender Development Index |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| IsDB | Islamic Development Bank |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| OIC | Organization of Islamic Cooperation |
| OPAAW | OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |





Purpose and Objective

1. The goal of the Women's Empowerment Policy (the Policy) is to contribute to sustainable and inclusive development in the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB/the Bank) member countries and Muslim communities in non-member countries by empowering women and girls to participate in and benefit from the development of their societies and communities. The Policy aims at improving the effectiveness of IsDB's development assistance so as to bring about greater socio-economic returns and deliver on its mandate.
2. The Policy is the first of its kind for IsDB and defines the commitment of the Bank to promote women's empowerment as a means to reduce poverty and foster sustainable development and inclusive growth. It also marks IsDB's promise to unlock the 'untapped potential' of women in its Member Countries and Muslim communities by establishing fundamental principles to guide its programmes and interventions to reduce the barriers to their economic and social development.
3. The Policy is intended to guide IsDB towards integrating women's empowerment in future operations, in line with the IsDB 10-Year Strategy and its reform agenda based on the President's 5-Year Program (2017–2022). The Policy will also contribute to the implementation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All IsDB Member Countries are signatories to these agreements, which include women's empowerment as a core element. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, includes a specific goal (SDG 5) of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, while recognizing women's empowerment as a catalyst for progress across all 17 SDGs.
4. The regions and communities supported by the IsDB Group are linked with many common factors; however, they have a vast plurality of ethnicities, languages, cultures, economic profiles and political systems. They also differ widely in levels of human development, with stable and resilient countries and communities, as well as fragile ones. The status of women and their level of participation in the socio-economic development of their communities and countries also vary across the regions. Some countries have made huge progress in closing gender gaps in education, while others are struggling with low female labour force participation and/or high maternal mortality.
5. The 2018 Human Development Index (HDI) showed that while many of the 57 IsDB Member Countries have made significant progress, 21 (36 per cent) were in the low human

development category.¹ More than half of the IsDB Member Countries (31) are classified as showing low levels of equality² in the 2018 Gender Development Index (GDI). This indicates that the majority of women and girls in IsDB Member Countries face significant barriers that limit their access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities, among other challenges.

6. There is wide recognition of the strong linkages between women's empowerment and improved development outcomes,³ and it can significantly contribute to reducing poverty and strengthening economic growth.⁴ Improving women's and girls' access to and control over resources can generate broader productivity gains, improve their social status and well-being and magnify economic benefits. This has made women's empowerment a central tool and goal for achieving effective and sustainable development.
7. IsDB is the only South–South regional development institution with the specific mandate to foster economic and social development in the Muslim World. Thus, it has a vital role to play not only within its Member Countries but globally. Achieving the goals of the global development agenda by 2030 relies heavily on increasing investment in sustainable development to stimulate global growth, while still protecting vulnerable populations and leaving no one behind. This Policy demonstrates the Bank's commitment to these actions.
8. The Policy capitalizes on IsDB's previous experiences and lessons learned in empowering women, through interventions that improved health, food security, economic opportunities, education and access to technology, and which enhanced women's financial literacy and business skills. The Policy is also aligned with Member Countries' national and international commitments to women's empowerment, and draws on the experiences and good practices of other multilateral development banks. The Policy is informed by the Technical Policy Study,⁵ which was prepared by the Bank and benefited from internal IsDB Group discussions and consultations with relevant stakeholders.

1. The HDI ranks countries by life expectancy, education (with two indicators) and income. Countries are ranked as having very high, high, medium or low human development.

2. The GDI groups countries into five categories by absolute deviation from gender parity in HDI values. Group 1 comprises countries with high levels of equality between women and men (absolute deviation less than 2.5 per cent); group 2 countries have medium-high equality (absolute deviation 2.5–5 per cent); group 3 countries have medium levels of equality (absolute deviation 5–7.5 per cent); group 4 countries have medium-low equality (absolute deviation 7.5–10 per cent); and group 5 countries have low levels of equality (absolute deviation greater than 10 per cent).

3. World Bank Group (2012) 'World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development'. World Bank Group, Washington, DC.

4. United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment (2016) 'Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment'. United Nations, New York.

5. The Technical Policy Study provides evidence-based recommendations for the Women's Empowerment Policy. The recommendations take into consideration: the strategic objectives of IsDB; its comparative advantage; lessons it has learned; the socio-economic situation of women and girls in IsDB Member Countries; international policy frameworks; and the global approach to women's empowerment.



Definitions

IsDB defines key concepts and terms used in this Policy as follows.

9. **Agency and participation** The capacity of an individual to make effective decisions and to participate actively in translating these decisions into positive outcomes, either for themselves, as a member of a household/group or through collective action.
10. **Gender analysis** A systematic methodology to examine social and economic differences between women and men. It looks at specific activities, conditions, needs, access to and control over resources, and access to development benefits and decision-making for men and women. Gender analysis studies linkages between these and other factors in the larger social, economic, political and environmental contexts.
11. **Gender equality** The state of having equal access to resources and opportunities for both women and men to bring about change.⁶ When women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full potential, they can contribute to, and benefit from, economic as well as social development.
12. **Gender equity** The process of being fair to women and men according to their needs, social standing and circumstances. The aim of equity is to achieve social justice and well-being.
13. **Gender gap** The difference or disparity in the ways women and men have access to opportunities in society and what they do and achieve, especially as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural and economic contexts.
14. **Gender mainstreaming** The systematic approach of assessing the implications of policies/programmes for women and men and integrating women's needs and perspectives in every

6. UN Women Gender Equality Glossary <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36>

stage of programme/policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, with a view to promoting women's empowerment.

15. **Women's empowerment** The process of expanding women's abilities and resources to make strategic life choices to fulfil their role as equal members of society and ensure their participation in equitable and sustainable development. This has two main features. First, it is a process or a series of actions taken to achieve a particular end, and as such, it is country/context-specific (i.e. based on the situation of the country and its needs and priorities). Second, it requires women to be agents of change/development.

Policy Scope

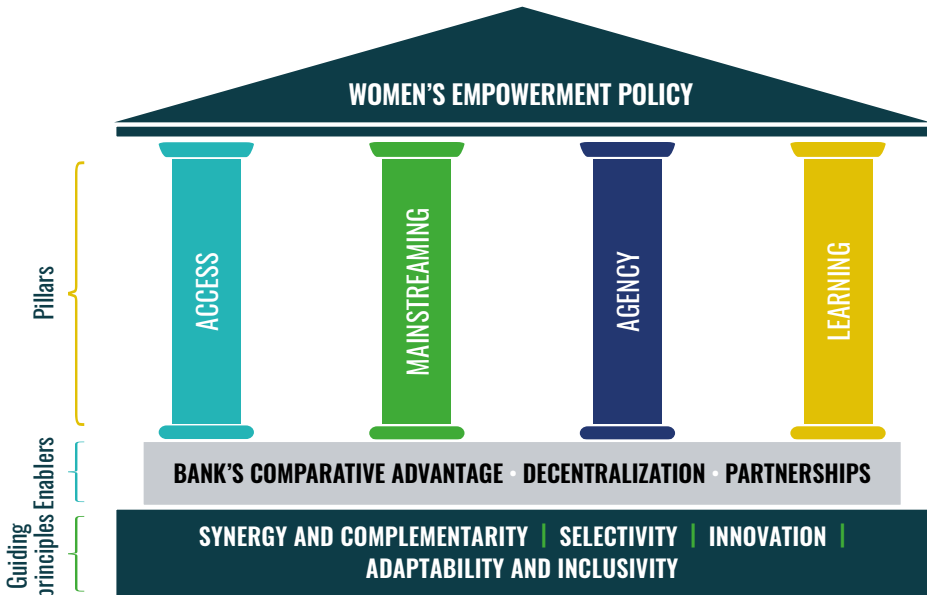
16. The Policy is designed to: (i) recognize the distinct roles and responsibilities of both women and men, which give them different yet complementary perspectives, needs, interests, roles and responsibilities; (ii) respond to women's specific needs, interests, vulnerabilities and capacities; (iii) identify and address barriers that hinder women's realization of their full potential; and (iv) support women's and girls' access to opportunities and resources to ensure that they meaningfully participate in and benefit from IsDB interventions, and that this leads to equitable and sustainable development in Member Countries and Muslim communities elsewhere.
17. The Policy will cover all IsDB sectors and areas of engagement. Recognizing that women's empowerment is relevant in each of these sectors and areas, the Policy will be applicable to all departments and units of IsDB. Accordingly, the Bank will integrate women's empowerment at all levels, not only in projects/programmes but also in all policies, strategies and operational procedures.
18. In the absence of women's empowerment units in IsDB Group entities, this Policy will guide any work related to women's empowerment done by the entities.

Guiding Principles

19. **The policy framework** (Figure 1). The Policy has four pillars, which reflect the challenges and priorities of Member Countries and IsDB's institutional and global commitments to support the countries to realize their national and international obligations. The pillars are: access, mainstreaming, agency and learning (Box 1). The Bank will address the four pillars guided by the following principles: capitalizing on synergies and complementarities, making

strategic choices in areas and modes of engagement, promoting innovation, and being adaptable to ensure inclusivity of all. Both the pillars and principles will be stimulated by key enablers that leverage the Bank's comparative advantage and unique instruments, capitalize on its decentralized structure and strengthen partnerships.

Figure 1. Framework for the Women's Empowerment Policy



Box 1. Pillars of the Women's Empowerment Policy

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <p>1. ACCESS</p> | <p>Remove barriers to women's access to basic services and infrastructure to leverage their empowerment, skills and productive resources, thereby increasing their economic opportunities and assisting them to accumulate and store wealth and build resilience</p> |
| <p>2. MAINSTREAMING</p> | <p>Introduce approaches and actions to integrate women's empowerment measures throughout the IsDB country programming and project cycle – from the Member Country Partnership Strategy, to project identification, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation and learning – to ensure women participate in and benefit from IsDB interventions in Member Countries and Muslim communities</p> |
| <p>3. AGENCY</p> | <p>Enhance women's effective engagement in the socio-economic development process, thus enabling them to have control over resources and participate fully in the development process of their communities and countries</p> |
| <p>4. LEARNING</p> | <p>Develop and facilitate knowledge, capacity development and learning opportunities among member countries, thereby scaling up good practices and driving innovation</p> |

Pillar 1: Improving access to resources and services

20. Women's equal access to productive and financial resources is critical for their empowerment and sustainable and inclusive growth and development. IsDB will ensure that its programmes facilitate equitable access to financial and technical resources and services for all women, regardless of age, disability status, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographical area or any other condition.
21. IsDB will support women's and girls' access to: (i) quality health services, including reproductive and maternal health services; (ii) primary, secondary and higher education and vocational training, promoting non-traditional trades such as science, technology, mathematics and engineering, as well as opportunities to develop 21st century skills and capacities; (iii) infrastructure that facilitates women's empowerment (e.g. inclusive and sustainable mobility, water and sanitation services, clean and affordable energy sources and storage facilities); (iv) economic opportunities and equitable and decent employment, with a focus on supporting the conditions necessary for women-owned and women-led micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, women entrepreneurs, farmers, traders and those in the informal sector; (v) finance and productive resources, including technology; and (vi) market opportunities and advancement within the value chain with engagement from the private sector.

Pillar 2: Mainstreaming women's needs

22. IsDB will mainstream the needs of women, and measures that promote gender equity, in its country partnership strategies, programmes and operations, especially those with the potential for high impact on women's empowerment.⁷ Gender analysis will ensure that women's empowerment issues are identified then considered at all the appropriate stages, from the formulation of Member Country Partnership Strategy through the programme and project cycle development, including preparation, appraisal, implementation and evaluation.
23. Mainstreaming women's empowerment includes: (i) integrating specific measures to ensure women and girls benefit from IsDB interventions; (ii) supporting women's engagement/participation in the project cycle; (iii) identifying relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators that are disaggregated by sex; (iv) allocating the financial and human resources necessary to support planned components/activities related

7. This will be determined through the use of a categorization system that assesses the extent to which women's empowerment issues are integrated into project design. This system will be used to identify projects/programmes that have the potential for high impact on women's empowerment and to formulate special measures.



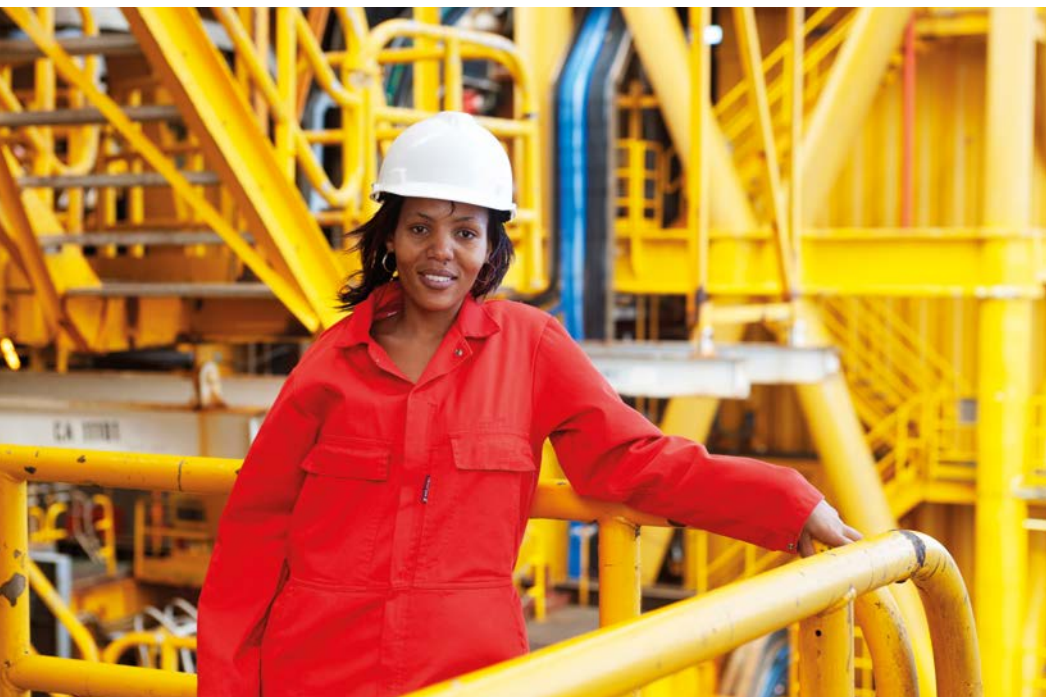
to women's empowerment; (v) establishing a tracking system to monitor the women's empowerment-related outcomes of IsDB operations, and setting targets by sector; and (vi) integrating sex-disaggregated data into relevant Core Sector Indicators (CSI) and identifying specific CSIs to measure achievements related to women's empowerment.

Pillar 3: Promoting women's agency and participation

24. Women's empowerment has a clear dimension of agency, which involves women's ability to control and decide on financial and productive resources and participate effectively in the development of their communities and countries. IsDB will support operations that contribute to enhancing women's participation, with special attention to women in fragile and crisis situations.
25. Agency can be promoted by: (i) developing women's leadership and organizational capabilities and skills; (ii) raising awareness of women's roles in the socio-economic development of their countries and communities; (iii) engaging men and boys at the local level as partners in the promotion of women's empowerment; (iv) promoting women's participation in local decision-making and service-delivery management bodies; and (v) piloting interventions that foster women's role as change agents in building community resilience to climate shocks, conflicts and crisis.

Pillar 4: Fostering learning and capacity development

26. By improving knowledge, fostering learning and developing capacities to promote women's empowerment, the Bank and its Member Countries will be equipped with the skills and capabilities to design evidence-based policies and programmes, and to apply proven approaches that successfully and effectively empower women.
27. To this end, IsDB will: (i) produce knowledge products to identify, capture and disseminate best practices as well as highlight new trends in women's and girls' empowerment; (ii) facilitate South–South cooperation and the exchange of expertise and knowledge between Member Countries about national policies and strategies/programmes that work for women's empowerment; (iii) endeavour to increase its knowledge on gender mainstreaming in specific sectors/sub-sectors (e.g. energy, certain value chains) or contexts (e.g. natural disasters/climate resilience); (iv) help build the capacity of Member Countries to generate sex-disaggregated data for planning and budgeting and for the development of inclusive policies and programmes; and (v) support Member Countries' adherence to their international commitments, such as SDG 5 and other relevant global targets.
28. **Enablers:** Enablers are actions or efforts designed to stimulate the pillars. The key enablers for achieving women's empowerment are as follows.



Leveraging the Bank's comparative advantage and unique instruments

29. A significant portion of IsDB development financing goes to infrastructure which can be a major enabler towards inclusive infrastructure that addresses women's needs and facilitates their empowerment. The Bank also has unique instruments such as Reverse Linkage, Transform Fund and Technical Assistance grants, in addition to a solid history of engagement with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which place it in a good position to improve the lives of women in Member Countries and Muslim communities elsewhere. Moreover, IsDB applies the core principles of Islamic finance which promote justice, inclusion and equality, to reach the most marginalized people, especially women, thereby 'leaving no one behind'. As a South–South multilateral institution with both Shareholders and Member Countries from the global South, the Bank's constituents consider it a trusted partner.
30. **Capitalizing on the Bank's decentralized structure** IsDB's decentralized structure enables it to optimize its impact in Member Countries and Muslim communities and enhance the successful implementation of this Policy. In liaising with governments, the Regional Hubs can ensure that women's needs are identified in the Member Country Partnership Strategy process and integrated into programmes, leading to better synergy, selectivity and focus in the Bank's interventions. The Regional Hubs will deliver on the IsDB women's empowerment agenda by engaging locally with relevant ministries, development partners and NGOs. In addition, placing social development specialists in Regional Hubs will facilitate identifying women's needs, and integrating relevant measures to address these needs in IsDB interventions.
31. **Strengthening partnerships** The implementation of the Policy will require nurturing existing and developing new partnerships within IsDB, in Member Countries and globally. IsDB is already engaged in many strategic partnerships that reinforce and strengthen its role in women's empowerment while preserving its niche as a South–South institution. Partnerships with other multilateral development banks, the private sector, United Nations agencies, bilateral institutions and NGOs have to be forged and further developed to leverage the financial and technical resources needed to support women's empowerment. In particular, partnerships must achieve two purposes: (i) mobilize resources and (ii) increase the sharing of knowledge, with the aim of enhancing synergies and capitalizing on experiences, lessons learned and best practices related to women's empowerment.
32. The following **guiding principles** will be considered within the implementation of the Policy and its pillars.

33. **Selectivity** All IsDB interventions will assess the needs of women and the particular barriers that prevent women from meaningfully engaging in a particular sector/operation. Based on this analysis, interventions with high potential to empower women will be strategically selected and supported with detailed action plans that will include specific components, targets and budget on women's empowerment. IsDB will also devise stand-alone projects and initiatives that target women to address gender disparities in sectors such as health, education, agriculture and financial services.

34. **Adaptability and inclusivity** IsDB will promote an adaptive and inclusive approach so that no one is left behind. Its programmes and projects will be responsive to the different needs of women. The Policy takes into consideration the diversity of Member Countries and Muslim



communities elsewhere, which requires a uniquely adaptive and country-specific approach to local contexts. The Bank's interventions will also take into account that, although women share common challenges, they are not a homogeneous group as there are other important intersectional factors that contribute to their position in society (e.g. age, ethnicity, disability and citizenship status). Moreover, as more than half (19) of the 36 countries categorized as fragile and conflict-affected countries are IsDB member countries.⁸ Some interventions will

8. World Bank Group (2018) 'Harmonized List of Fragile Situations FY19'. Washington, DC.

specifically focus on addressing the challenges, needs and priorities of women and girls living in these situations.

35. **Synergies and complementarities** IsDB will promote women's empowerment as a shared institutional responsibility requiring the collective commitment of and contributions (in terms of both financial resources and knowledge assets) from all staff within the Group entities to achieve results for greater impact. It will promote joint initiatives and programmes within the IsDB Group and with development partners.
36. **Innovation** IsDB will promote the use of new technologies and innovations that ensure women's empowerment and well-being. Targeted/stand-alone interventions can be used to pilot innovative approaches or to complement existing efforts that have not taken into account women's needs.



Roles and Responsibilities

37. Responsibility for the implementation of the Policy will remain with the business units of all departments/entities participating in IsDB programmes and interventions. To this end, IsDB will define and put in place procedures necessary for sound, sustainable and effective implementation of the Policy. A strategy for implementation will be developed to operationalize the Policy.
38. IsDB will gradually and consistently build the capacity of its staff to promote women's empowerment in their work programmes and country engagements. IsDB will commit sufficient human and financial resources, and clear and measurable accountability mechanisms for the successful implementation of this Policy.
39. The Policy requires IsDB to constantly monitor its own performance in support of women's empowerment. The Bank will monitor the implementation of the Policy and make adjustments as needed, recognizing that country circumstances may change and that operational priorities should be adapted accordingly.
40. IsDB will use its relevant financial instruments and windows to fund operations that are stand-alone and/or that mainstream women's empowerment. Although, previously, the majority of women's empowerment interventions were limited to grant resources, relevant IsDB financing mechanisms will be mobilized and/or allocated for funding these interventions.
41. The IsDB Group will continue to explore options for resource mobilization to fund stand-alone women's empowerment programmes. Specifically, it will explore new partnerships and

improve existing ones to increase the availability of resources for impactful interventions. In line with the strategic direction of the Bank, particular focus will be given to private sector resourcing.



Related Documents

42. The Policy is guided by the IsDB Group's 10-Year Strategy, namely the strategic objectives of inclusiveness, connectivity, and Islamic finance sector growth; and the President's 5-Year Program,⁹ specifically the delivery and competency tracks. It contributes to the realization of the OPAAW and the SDGs, particularly SDG 5, which directly targets women's empowerment, and the gender-related targets in all 17 SDGs. The Policy is also informed by the Technical Policy Study developed by the Bank.



Version History

43. This is the first IsDB Women's Empowerment Policy to be approved by the IsDB Board of Executive Directors.

9. The President's 5-Year Plan states: "IsDB has to change gradually into a bank for development and developers by affording communities in Member Countries, and in Muslim communities in non-member countries, the opportunity to participate in IsDB's programs and projects. Developers are the real change agents in their societies." Women are key developers and change agents in their communities and countries.



Photo credits

Page 3: La bionda sulla Honda/Shutterstock.com; page 8: braccio/istockphoto.com;
all other images: IsDB



Contact details

Islamic Development Bank
8111 King Khalid St., Al Nuzlah Al Yamaniyah Dist. Unit No. 1, Jeddah
22332-2444
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Tel: +966 12 636 1400

E-mail: wye@isdb.org
Web: www.isdb.org