

Women and the Green Economy: Engaging with the New Development Bank

By Govind Kelkar and Sudeshna Sengupta



1. Conceptualizing Green Economy and Feminist Concerns

The concept of Green Economy has been operationalized for the last 10 years. Politically, the concept became prevalent from the negotiation in Environmental Summit of 1992. Rio 20 became the platform where the idea of Green Economy started growing more prevalent. UNEP defines a green economy as one that results in *improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities*. In a Green Economy, however, the Rights approach to development and gender equality has been missing. Growth in income and employment is to be driven by public and private investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The development path should maintain, enhance and, where necessary, rebuild natural capital as a critical economic asset and as a source of public benefits, especially for the economically marginalized whose livelihood security depends on natural resources.¹

The OECD defines Green Growth as the “means of fostering economic growth and development, while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies”. To do this, it must catalyze investment and innovation which will underpin sustained growth and give rise to new economic opportunities.”² Pointing out the Global South concern on conceptualizing Green Economy in a recent webinar hosted by the BRICS Feminist Watch (BFW), Mariama Williams stated that some South feminists were not happy with this agenda as it might shift the focus from sustainable development, especially if the Green Economy only puts price tags on nature and was not concerned about human rights. Feminists are of the opinion that it is important that Green Economy should engage with political, social and environmental concerns and ensure adequate participation of women and recognize their contributions. Women are not to be looked at only as target beneficiaries impacted by the transition process to Green Economy. This paper presents the progressive feminist position on incorporating Green Economy within the policy domain of National Development Bank (NDB). The paper starts by conventional conceptualizations of Green Economy and then moves to a feminist critique of these conceptualizations. Section 2 of the paper deals with gender equality or lack of it in BRICS countries followed by the agenda and advocacy by feminists and progressive civil society. Section 4 of the paper looks at the discourse between Green Economy and Sustainable Development followed by Section 5 which points out absence of women in these debates. Section 6 posits BFW’s overarching concerns on gender equality. The concluding Section 7 puts forward a series of considerations for NDB strategy and practice.

2. BRICS and Gender Equality

As far as gender equality is concerned, BRICS countries, which include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, are not on the same page. Women's subordination exists in various forms making it difficult to do a comparative analysis of the countries, notwithstanding the difference in the character of political establishments. Throughout the BRICS countries there are inequalities in social, economic, political, cultural and educational spheres, and discrimination in rights enforcement policies and practices. These have an impact which is both negative and synergic to achieving greater equality between women and men. In addition, all progressive civil society discourses have been flooded with the concern on lack of policy implementation and of participation of civil society. Questions were raised in the BFW Webinar on quality, space and mechanisms to enable meaningful civil society participation, in particular of women and community groups/organizations. It will be important to regularize and legitimize civil society participation and their monitoring of the development process including progress in gender equality.

Pointing out the need to embed gender equality into the core of NDB policies Graciela Rodriguez,³ stated that to address gender equality issues one needs to understand the link between the economic realm and cultural representation. The gender asymmetries are interwoven with cultural, political and economic asymmetries and hence the entangled inequality of women in a multidimensional situation.

For example, in both Brazil and India women's workforce participation has been noticeably low and the salary gaps are as high as 60-70%. Women are concentrated in the informal sector. The working condition of women requires introspection on adverse effects of economic growth on marginalized women's lives and lack of job opportunities. Women in all the BRICS countries are also confronted with problems of inequality and discrimination, domestic and sexual violence, absence of sexual and reproductive rights, unequal pay between women and men. These show that gender injustice is an issue that needs to be addressed in the BRICS countries. The sustainable development agenda in all the BRICS countries should have a strong focus on gender justice (i.e., non-discrimination, equality of rights to resources and freedom from violence) and decent working conditions as well as ownership and control of productive resources.

Among the BRICS countries, China is the biggest player, which has made huge overseas investments. At the webinar that took place on the 20th of February, 2019, it was said that China is concerned with climate change and sustainable energy and has a growing national discourse on policy guidelines on Green Economy. It has adopted Green

Economy within the top-level policy design to focus its concern on development of green finance, environmental governance and policies for overseas investment requiring compliance, due diligence and international norms. However, these policies are weak in enforcement and not legally binding. The voluntary nature of the regulation and lack of grievance redressal mechanisms furthers the process of weak implementation of guidelines and procedures. There is a need to improve transparency of the processes and strengthen measures to address gender equality.

While, on the one hand, women's movements are growing stronger globally, on the other, market fundamentalism and religious intolerance are obstructing gender equality. The New Development Bank therefore needs to prove that it stands to its commitment to gender justice.

3. Feminists, Progressive Civil Society Agenda and Advocacy

The BRICS Bank, which subsequently came to be known as the New Development Bank (NDB), was created through the Fortaleza Declaration in 2014. Its member countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, are spread over three continents. The political history and trajectories of the member countries vary widely and they also differ in economic strength. As emerging economies, the governance systems deal with poverty, issues of democracy, economic development, geopolitics, and the environment in their own ways. Since the Bank is set to influence the global development scenario, it is important that gender equality should be placed at the core of its policies from the inception of institution building.

Shortly after the Fortaleza declaration, BRICS Feminist Watch (BFW) was formed in 2016 as a feminist alliance within the BRICS countries. The group brings together decades of collective strength of feminist analysis and activism to promote gender responsive and inclusive economic development. The forum emerged as a feminist voice from the Global South, with a vision for a more just, democratic, and gender-equal world. The integration of a feminist agenda of the South into the BRICS policies and institutions is vital to achieving these goals. Feminist engagement with the New Development Bank (NDB) becomes necessary to underpin gender equality in the political economy and its development policies.

BFW promotes sustainable development grounded in gender justice in the BRICS countries. The mission is to challenge mainstream economic development models that are based on extractivism of natural resources, and of women's bodies and labour, and to shift the dominant development discourse towards being more just, inclusive, and sustainable. BFW is committed to upholding the economic, social, political and cultural rights and the empowerment of all women and girls. It intends to work with the BRICS governments

and institutions, including the NDB, to place women at the centre of the sustainable development discourse, and create structures, institutions, and policies to ensure holistic and long-lasting empowerment of women in all their diversities.

As stated in the 2017 BFW policy paper,

Most IFIs have adopted a gender policy and explicitly bring a gender focus into their environment and social framework. Many, including the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) recognize the vital role of women in development and have adopted policies and strategies that further gender equality as a key development objective. Some of them, such as the IDB and the ADB, have enacted processes that allow for gender mainstreaming in their operations and strategies, and most have attempted to ensure that their internal structure becomes more gender-responsive and gender-just. In our analysis of regional banks and the World Bank, we noted that the three regional banks (Brazil National Development Bank, African Development Bank and Asian Development Bank) promote projects and programs that contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment. Over the past decade, the African and Asian Development Banks have made concerted efforts, through consultations with women's organizations, feminist experts, and civil society groups to have a gender policy in place. These strategies and frameworks recognize women as independent development, economic, and income agents. The World Bank recognizes gender equality as an issue of development effectiveness and not just a matter of political correctness or charity. When women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster.⁴

BFW engages with the NDB to advocate gender equality within the political economy of development. The advocacy efforts resulted so far are stated to be NDB's environmental and social framework with attention to underlining meaningful consultation and gender equity.

Inclusion of Gender Concerns:

BFW would like to reiterate what the NDB pointed out in its Environment and Social Framework on Gender: “Identify any potential gender-specific adverse impacts of the project and undertake to develop mitigation measures to reduce these. Where relevant, consider enhancing the design of the project to promote equality of opportunity and women's socio-economic empowerment, particularly with respect to access to finance, services and employment.”⁵ Further we would like to add the following three areas:

• Gender - responsive Infrastructure Development-

Carbon emission is closely related to urbanization, building of roads and transports, dams and so on. High growth and urbanization are promoted by all BRICS countries;

¹ UNEP (2011), Green Economy Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication, A Synthesis for Policy makers

² OECD (2011) , Towards Green Growth, A Summary for Policy Makers

³ Rodriguez, Graciela (2017), The BRICS and Development with Gender Equity, Equit Instituto Publication

⁴ Govind Kelkar, Priti Darooka and Divita Shandilya, Why the New Development Bank Should Have a Gender Policy, BFW Publication, 2017

⁵ New Development Bank (2016): New Development Bank Environment and Social Framework website: <https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ndb-environment-social-framework-20160330.pdf> accessed in March 2019

China, Brazil and India are, in particular, carrying out heavy investments in infrastructure projects. Gender equality has been a missing factor in this development and requires serious attention to building a gender-responsive and just transition to sustainable habitats in rural and urban areas.

- **Renewable, Clean and Sustainable Energy** - The Green Economy lens points out an immediate reduction of consumption of fossil fuels and shift to green, renewable and clean energy. As it has been acknowledged widely, a highly disproportionate number of women are trapped in using energy that is neither clean nor renewable. Cooking with biomass in Asia and Africa leads to a large amount of carbon emissions. The NDB is playing a big role in financing modern energy in member countries which have the potential to influence policies and programs in all countries.
- **Promotion of Green Jobs** - ILO suggests a human centric approach to the future of work and recommends Green Jobs as a measure to increasing investment in women's capabilities; increasing investment in institutions of work; and increasing investment in decent and sustainable work, particularly for women. NDB needs to pay particular attention to building/strengthening women's capabilities, knowledge, participation in formal economic work and decision making

4. Green Economy and Sustainable Development

Since the second half of the first decade of the twenty first century, almost all countries around the world increasingly experienced three interlinked crises: the financial crisis, high oil prices and climate change. The Green New Deal Report⁶ recommended, by way of its policy formulation for the United Kingdom, the following practice at the international level:

- Allow all countries greater autonomy over domestic monetary policies (interest rates and money supply) and fiscal policy (government spending and taxation)
- Set up a formal international target for atmospheric greenhouse gas concentration to keep future temperature rise below 2°C
- Deliver a fair and equitable international climate agreement to follow the Kyoto Protocol in 2012
- Accord developing countries the opportunity to escape poverty without fuelling global warming by helping to finance massive investment in climate-change adaptation and renewable energy

- Support the free and unconstrained transfer of new energy technologies to developing countries

However, this document is strangely gender-blind and only mentions women in relation to food security as beneficiaries rather than as active agents and producers within the process of the Green New Deal. Green Economy can be regarded as one that has low carbon emission, is resource efficient, gender-responsive and socially inclusive. The idea was to address marginalization of some social groups and depletion of resources in the process of economic growth in the Global South and in the Global North⁷.

It has been argued that the discourse on the Green Economy has been Euro-centric in its concerns on development: tends to ignore multilateral concerns and the creation of spaces for implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Lima Work Programme on Gender. The Lima Gender Action Plan mandates gender-related actions in finance, technology development and transfer and capacity development in building a Green Economy. For both processes the fundamental line is to shift from an expropriation model of development to that of sustainability and renewability of natural resources to prevent resource depletion. The Rio+20 Summit was the alarm bell which has now become a reality and the world can no longer continue with an economic model that prefers 'profit over people'. It is in this area where financial institutions like the NDB can play an important role and make Human Rights its core principle by putting 'people over profit'.

These processes are, however, not free of tensions. In the BFW Webinar Mariama Williams flagged the following two of the multiple "tensions and dynamics" surrounding the Green Economy and its uses:

- Equity has multiple dimensions. It includes North South dynamics, intergenerational equity in terms of how we are preserving or not preserving our planet for future generations; gender equity from the feminist perspective that emphasizes women's empowerment, equality of rights, recognition of work and protection of rights including that of minorities and indigenous peoples. The Sustainable Development agenda takes multidimensionality within its fold while the Green Economy is, in some ways, a "one size fits all" model. Hence, from the social and economic development perspective, a significant challenge is how to fit the Green Economy within the SDG framework. In this context the Green Economy should be operationalized in the Environment, Development and Equity (EDE) framework Equity and in the context of Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR).

- There is also the growing tension between the trade system and the Green Economy/Sustainable Development Framework. In a one size- fits-all approach, there may be a tendency to treat all countries the same, neglecting CBDR flexibilities, special treatment accompanied by the lack of provision of means of implementation, including technology transfer and trade protectionism such as with unilateral trade measures, through the use and misuse of carbon tariffs, border adjustment taxes which could be assessed against products of developing countries. Additionally, too rigid an approach to intellectual property rights ignores pre-existing development challenges of many African, Asian, Latin American and Caribbean countries and has adverse social and economic consequences for the lives of the women and men living in these countries.

Discussing the process of embedding the Green Economy within the Sustainable Development agenda, Graciela Rodriguez pointed to the complexity of the task and flagged the following issues:

- There is a need to discuss technological development while implementing Green Economy globally as China and the USA play shifting roles of power and a tug of war over trade and finance.
- Growth of right wing/neo-fascist movements have become a major issue, especially the election of new regimes in South America and strengthening of the right wing. The intervention of the US in Venezuela suggests populism is gaining ground and hence we cannot disassociate economic and hegemonic struggles while discussing Sustainable Development and the Green Economy.

5. Where are the women in these debates?

The safeguard standard on gender equality is linked to a Policy and Strategy document of the UNEP on gender equality.⁸ This document was developed on the basis of the Rio+20 outcome document and the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment (UNSWAP). It articulates the principles and structure of institutions to realize its objective, goal and vision.⁹ The Policy and Strategy draws from an accountability framework which makes actors interacting through institutional relationships accountable.

The Paris Agreement opened the door for a gender accountability approach. All actors, namely, the rights holders (citizens), the duty bearers (state agencies), civil society and the gender experts need to ensure that the institutions through which the actors are interacting with each other are gender responsive and accountable. The feminist concerns are that it can be achieved by a) providing

sex disaggregated data for all programs and planning, b) gender budgeting and auditing, and c) strengthening policy making and services. Also, there is a need for developing strategic alliances and networks for gender accountability.

The Sustainable Development Goals have earmarked the targets on the interlinked goals on gender equality, decent work, access to clean energy, sustainability of agriculture, climate action and sustainable cities and towns. The intent is to create a world in which people are understood to be at the centre of sustainable development that is just, equitable and inclusive, and where sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental protection are achieved, with benefit for all.

BFW recommends a shift in development paradigm. The NDB needs to create an enabling environment for increasing and ensuring women's agency in economic and political spheres. Women's active participation is needed within all the development processes, not just in segregated marginalized spaces but as political agents within the mainstream economic agenda.

In the webinar, Mariama Williams questioned whether the role of women or the concerns and priorities of women in their multiple realities are taken into account in the just transition to 'Green Jobs'. Women are often affected by the change and have a more active role to play. Millions of women who are in agriculture, the informal economy or are self-employed are exposed to toxic chemicals used in development projects adopted by countries. They are in the bottom most tier of the supply chain, taking up hazardous occupations with precarious working conditions. It is important to realize that women and men are impacted differently through development projects, not only as users of energy, water etc. but also as workers and contributors. Poverty eradication through the Green Economy needs to factor in all of the above and cannot assume that development can happen in a gender-neutral way.

In order to achieve the SDG commitment of "no one is left behind", gender equality is non-negotiable.¹⁰ The development trajectories of countries have established that equal access for women and girls to education, healthcare, decent work, right to ownership and control of productive assets and economic resources, active participation in democratic processes can enable countries to realize sustainable development and growth. There is need to i) promote and invest in programs that contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment; ii) engage in consultations with women's organizations, feminist experts and iii) civil society groups to develop a gender policy which will look at the economic contribution by women and also

⁶ A Green New Deal: Joined-up policies to solve the triple crunch of the credit crisis, climate change and high oil prices The first report of the Green New Deal Group, 2008

⁷ Amorim Alice (2018), International Sustainable and Climate Finance: Where are we and which is the role of China on this? Policy Brief by BRICS Policy Centre

⁸ <http://www.unenvironment.org/about-un-environment/why-does-environment-matter/environmental-social-and-economic> accessed in March 2019

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ UNEP (2011), Green Economy Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication, A Synthesis for Policy makers

allow them to develop as autonomous, individual economic and social agents to claim their voice in fair and parity-based distribution of productive assets (land, housing, new technology), decent work, water, sustainable energy and infrastructure.

6. BFW for an Overarching Gender Equality

The question is how can the Bank, through its funding, address gender issues which are so prevalent in BRICS countries in the form of gender-based violence and gender discrimination, women's low participation in the workforce and their unrecognized, unpaid work. The challenge is one of creating mechanisms to monitor policies, providing space to women's organizations and civil society groups and prevent violations of women's rights by informal and formal institutions (i.e., households, communities, State agencies and the market). As part of their engagement with the NDB, BFW suggested three broad guidelines:

- Strengthen women's footprint, especially with respect to training in feminist economy and gender parity in the NDB;
- Strengthen policies on gender equality in BRICS countries (and in the countries where the Bank operates) that will seek to prevent multiple discrimination and violence against women in economic, social and institutional spheres and make substantial efforts to overcome gender inequalities;
- Strengthen consultations with civil society, particularly women's organizations in the BRICS countries and in societies where there are projects funded by the NDB.

BFW suggests that the NDB creates a Gender Policy to prevent harmful outcomes and include strong safeguard measures. BFW is concerned that NDB's strategy plan "undermines women's rights as a core development objective".¹¹ On the basic approach to gender equality, BFW suggests:¹²

In order to achieve this, the Bank has to keep central issue around gender equality both intrinsically as a value and as a means of pursuing its goals of reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity. The NDB should have a strong political will for ensuring gender equality and should demonstrate this by adopting a policy of support and making efforts to institutionalize gender issues, as well as adopt management practices that afford enough support to gender issues as a cross-cutting theme."

It can draw from the fact that its member States are signatories to the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Child Rights Convention (CRC) as well as a range of other conventions including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and International Covenant

on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The gender policy will work as the normative framework adopted by the Bank to initiate action and to monitor progress and work as the link between the Bank's activities and its economic and social principles.

7. Considerations for NDB Strategy and Practice

As part of its investment strategy, the NDB needs to keep in mind the inequality between women and men, and the inequalities based on race, ethnicity, class, caste, geographic locations, abilities, among others, in regard to skills and asset rights, education, and disproportional participation in unpaid, low and underpaid work both in green and non-green jobs. Project monitoring should take into account how it is reducing inequalities between women and men by reducing skill gaps, the wage differential, gender-based occupational segregation and invisible contribution of women through their production and social reproduction work. It is imperative for the NDB as the development bank for BRICS economies to:

- Prioritize and finance projects that will promote gender equality in the form of reducing unpaid work burden of women and girls, addressing occupational segregation and gender-based disparities while promoting sustainable development.
- Assess and audit infrastructure industries financed by the NDB to see the extent to which the principles of green and decent jobs are promoted and upheld. The right to work should be linked to the right to Decent Work and right to Green Jobs in terms of decent working conditions and access to social security. A project should be able to monitor outcomes on the basis of the above.
- Ensure skilling and reskilling with gender-responsive feminist framework in case of transition from non-green to green jobs. There is a need for opportunities for lifelong learning. It should be built with monitoring mechanisms to achieve gender integration in its projects resulting in reduction of unpaid care work by women, recognition of unpaid work and redistribution of gendered work in both formal and informal settings.

Drawing from feminist analysis and multiple advocacy documents of BFW, the following actions are recommended:

• Gender Advisory Committee and Gender Strategy:

The NDB should constitute a gender advisory committee to advise the bank, not as mere window dressing but with a mandate to influence policies. This committee should comprise government representatives from the BRICS countries, the private sector, members from BFW and other civil society organizations and feminist experts. The committee will help the NDB to develop a gender

strategy. This strategy will address the overlapping issues concerning women and the environment and treat both gender equality and the environment as non-negotiable for human wellbeing. In addition, the NDB should establish a Gender Unit with feminist experts as its members, so that the gender strategy developed by the NDB is mainstreamed and monitored through its institutional structures and operations.

• Consultations with women's organization and civil society groups:

The Bank should engage with women's organizations and civil society groups through dialogues and consultations for its own capacity development as well as taking on board concerns of women and of civil society groups and communities whose lives have been impacted by its projects. Women's rights and environmental concerns are the focus of these engagements. This engagement should be transparent and embedded within the institutional mechanism and feedback loop, and to ensure/oversee that human rights are not violated through its projects and programs.

• Enabling the gender friendly framework:

Ongoing future projects of the NDB should incorporate a framework to support and strengthen women's ownership and management rights to land and productive assets and skill development by providing institutional credit to women as individuals or collectives by introducing labour saving technologies for women both in the realms of production and reproduction.

• Leadership:

An adequate number of women (45-50 percent) should be included as managers and workers in transmission line projects, infrastructure development, as well as

in the governance bodies of new energy projects and management of productive assets and technology.

• Outcome Monitoring, Evaluation and Research:

There should be process monitoring and impact evaluation of NDB projects relating to women and girls, governance and the allocation of gender budgets, with gender equality and environmental sustainability at the core of the monitoring and evaluation processes.

• Capacity Development:

Capacity development on gender responsive project implementation of the State and market agencies to address gender equality in planning, monitoring and budgeting. Capacity development is needed to ensure that sustainability and gender equality are embedded at the macro, meso and micro levels of project formulation and implementation.

• Technology:

Since the early 1990s women have argued for their right to access and use new technologies. In the Zapatista movement in Mexico in 1995, rural and indigenous women articulated their right "to be respected, to study and even the right to learn how to drive cars"¹³. And in the Karnataka state of India, a village woman stated at a Conference "Male environmentalists have hijacked our movement. We want both development (like schools, roads etc) and our forests. We want industries too. But we want to control our resources and decide on their use."¹⁴ These efforts to access technology continue, as in the instance of the Barefoot College in Tilonia, Rajasthan and SEWA in Munger, Bihar. The women have proudly shown their skill to operate solar systems in Rajasthan and tractors and transplanters in Bihar. Such innovation needs scaling up through NDB investments and infrastructure development.

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¹¹ Govind Kelkar, Priti Darooka and Divita Shandilya (2017), Why the New Development Bank Should Have a Gender Policy,BFW Publication

¹² Govind Kelkar, Priti Darooka and Divita Shandilya (2017), Why the New Development Bank Should Have a Gender Policy,BFW Publication

¹³ Monthly Review Press 1995:97

¹⁴ National Women's Conference, June 1993

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