

Gender- positive action for food system employment



INITIATIVE ON
Rethinking
Food Markets

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KISM guidance series: Implementing credible and innovative practices in food markets

Paper 1: Practical considerations for gender-positive employment in agri-food systems

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Contents

Purpose of this guidance note	2
Section 1: An overview of gender equity issues in agri-food system employment.....	4
Characteristics of female employment in agri-food systems	4
Agri-food system interventions, enabling policies and their effects on female employment	6
Intervention groups	6
Enabling policies.....	7
Knowledge gaps: Gender systems approaches.....	8
Section 2: A toolkit and good practices for addressing gender equality	9
Overview of the gender equity toolkit and its original purpose.....	9
Relevance to other agri-food actors	9
Elements of a comprehensive gender transformative approach	10
Recommendations.....	13

Purpose of this guidance note

This guidance note is the first in a series developed by [Evidensia](#) and [ISEAL](#) for the [Knowledge Platform for Inclusive and Sustainable Food Markets \(KISM\)](#), as part of the CGIAR Rethinking Food Markets Initiative¹. This draws on the initiative's "Creating more and better employment in agrifood systems" meta-study to explore key interventions that are fundamental to creating and promoting inclusive employment and decent work in agri-food systems. Each note focuses on one of three interventions: gender-positive action; equitable digital innovations; food standards that include labour provisions.

Within this guidance note, we present the areas in which women continue to be disadvantaged in agri-food system employment, and the inclusion effects of various employment interventions and enabling policies on women specifically. We then present a package of gender-sensitive analysis and action tools, originally developed for voluntary sustainability systems under the CGIAR HER+ initiative. Finally we suggest ways in which other agri-food actors could adopt similar actions.

The information in this note is valuable for all agri-food value chain actors, as everyone can play a role in promoting gender equity. However, those stakeholders playing a governance role, such as policymakers and regulators, employers, collective action organisations, and voluntary sustainability systems, may find this guidance note a particularly useful resource.

¹ Please note that we anticipate further insights and updates will emerge on this topic following the completion of the [Rethinking Food Markets Initiative](#), and its CGIAR sister initiative HER+: *Harnessing gender and social equality for resilience in agrifood systems*. These initiatives are expected to yield critical data and refined strategies that are of value to agri-food system actors.

We are committed to keeping all stakeholders informed and will share detailed findings and recommendations through the open-access [KISM](#) platform as research is published. We also encourage stakeholders to check the [CGIAR Gender Impact Platform](#) for further resources.

For more information visit www.kismfoodmarkets.org or sign up to the KISM mailing list [here](#). Thank you for your engagement, and please look out for forthcoming communications on these developments.

Main conclusions and recommendations:

Conclusions:

- **Persistent gender disparities:** Women often face informal, lower-paid, and less secure employment compared to men in agri-food systems. Their work tends to be clustered in off-farm processing work, though on-farm and post-harvest roles are growing. Across these systems wage and productivity gaps remain significant with women earning 82% of men's wages. Many agricultural jobs lack fair income, security, and social protections, disproportionately affecting women and girls, with women overrepresented in exploitative labour arrangements.
- **Impact evidence overview:** Participation in global value chains may offer better job conditions, but benefits vary across contexts. Regulatory measures have had limited widespread impact on improving women's jobs, and informal subcontracting worsens working conditions. Seven key interventions have been shown to have a positive effect on the employment opportunities and job quality for women in agri-food systems. These include digital innovation and mechanisation, food standards with labour provision, modern contracts, social protection combined with economic development, and collective action organisations.
- **Gender-transformative approach:** Achieving gender equity requires organisations to centre the issue. It also requires them to play their part in addressing discriminatory institutions, infrastructure gaps, accepted gender norms, and power dynamics in food systems.

Recommendations:

To take a gender-transformative approach, agri-food value chain organisations should:

- **Develop a tailored gender strategy:**
 - This gender strategy should be informed by a review of existing policies and gender data. As part of the process and the strategy gender-disaggregated data should be generated to inform policy and track progress
 - Organisations should engage employees in strategy development and implementation, and larger organisations should consider hiring a dedicated gender advisor.
 - Larger organisations should also conduct gender-sensitive value chain analyses and share findings
- **Strengthen organisational capacities and contribute to gender mainstreaming externally:**
 - Organisations should implement "do no harm" practices, including gender-sensitive policies and employment practices.
 - Organisations can contribute to an enabling environment by supporting women's leadership, addressing unpaid care work, and preventing harassment and violence. Activities may include childcare support. Stakeholder training, and influencing suppliers and buyers to take a more inclusive approach.
- **Ensure accountability on gender equality goals:**
 - Organisations should establish accountability mechanisms and specific performance indicators, sharing gender-disaggregated data publicly.
 - Organisations should also provide training for leadership to address unconscious bias and structural barriers
 - Organisations should develop clear policies on gender equality and create channels for employee feedback.

See [Section 2: A toolkit and good practices for addressing gender equality](#) for more details and signposting to relevant tools

Section 1: An overview of gender equity issues in agri-food system employment

Please note: *This section draws on the findings of the meta-study “[Creating more and better employment in agrifood systems](#)”, by Julio Berdegue et al, 2023. Any supplementary material used is cited in the text*

Characteristics of female employment in agri-food systems

Within agri-food systems (AFS), there are still significant gender disparities though women are well-represented (constituting 38% of all workers in primary agricultural production, and 41% in off-farm segments, such as processing and services). Despite their critical contributions, women often face informal, lower-paid, and less secure employment conditions compared to men, who dominate higher-income, formal roles. In fact, on average, it is middle-aged, asset-rich, men who are the primary beneficiaries of interventions that aim to improve employment opportunities (both quantity and quality) in AFS.

Additionally, most “own account” agricultural production is based on self-employed family workers (paid or unpaid) and contributing family workers (mostly unpaid). Women continue to be overrepresented in the latter, making up 49% of such contributing family workers, compared to 17% of men.

Emerging trends in food markets - and adjacent sectors, such as urbanisation, and technology - present opportunities for inclusive growth. Modern value chains and policies emphasising sustainability, fair trade, and safety could improve employment prospects for disadvantaged groups, including women. However, achieving equitable outcomes requires addressing infrastructure deficiencies, gender norms, and unequal power dynamics in food systems.

Female representation across contexts and segments

Global data reflects regional variations in women’s roles. Women generally dominate food processing jobs in several countries - accounting for over 60% of workers in 12 out of 18 countries analysed - compared to agricultural production. Yet there are significant variations between countries. For example, in several countries, the figure of women in processing and services is as high as 80%. In Malawi, the figure is closer to 30%.

While female employment and participation in farm production and postharvest processes is growing, it remains constrained by cultural and structural barriers. In fact, these are areas in which gender roles (and stereotypes - being careful, patient, self-sacrificing, having suitable physical characteristics, such as smaller hands etc) are reinforced. Women represent only 15% of workers in transportation, and growth in female participation is slower in the areas of commercial intermediation, and contract negotiation - typically male-gendered pursuits.

Rural employment diversification and women

Rural households globally tend to diversify their income sources rather than specialise, engaging in a mix of farm and non-farm activities. Studies highlight the significant role of the non-farm economy (RNFE) in livelihoods. For example, research in Myanmar reveals that a majority of rural households participate in non-farm activities, with 45% engaged in trade, ranging from food wholesales to car dealerships. A similar trend of growing RNFE was found to be present in India. Interestingly, here researchers found that mobile phone ownership was correlated with participation in different forms of off-farm employment, and the association was stronger in female-headed than in male-headed households.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, women are disproportionately involved in the RNFE, with participation rates often double or triple those of men (ranging from 16% to 93%, with an average of 71%). For example, small-scale

trade dominates non-farm employment in Mexico, while in Chile, poorer rural areas exhibit higher proportions of “multiactive” households (i.e. those generating income from both agricultural and non-agricultural employment) in poorer rural areas than in richer ones. Brazil exemplifies a more advanced diversification process, leading scholars to describe an “urbanisation of rural Brazil”, as purely agricultural income decreased in prevalence and comparative value.

Income, productivity and resource access gaps

In AFS wage and productivity gaps continue to be significant, with women earning 82% of men’s wages on average. This is far from ideal, as women’s income from agricultural jobs remains critical for their household.

The disparity in income amongst wage-earners is attributed primarily to structural discrimination and bias and secondarily to differences in resource access, such as land and education. Meanwhile, productivity gaps between male and female plot managers are often explained by women’s limited access to resources (e.g. endowment disadvantages) and restrictive cultural norms. However, when external conditions are controlled, productivity differences diminish, and it should be noted that measurement challenges can lead to these gaps being exaggerated.

Decent work, working conditions, and inclusive business

Decent work in agriculture is vital for ensuring fair income, security, and social protection, yet many agricultural jobs fail to meet these standards. Informality, lack of oversight, and geographic dispersion characterise employment in AFS, contributing to low wages, hazardous working conditions, instability, and limited social protections.

These challenges disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and migrants. Women are overrepresented in exploitative labour arrangements such as subcontracting, seasonal contracts, and modern forms of slavery, often receiving the lowest pay in AVC both in on- and non- farm employment. Despite this, some women report satisfaction with their jobs and working conditions, likely due to their lower expectations of working conditions.

In rural areas, where economic opportunities are limited, poor working conditions, weak institutions, and oppressive gender norms tend to be more pronounced. Education systems in these regions often lack quality and relevance, exacerbating these challenges and leaving rural youth – particularly young women – to face the dilemma of staying in low-quality jobs or migrating for better opportunities. Non-agricultural employment, while still limited in some rural contexts, has a stronger correlation with benefits such as improved nutrition and education, increasing the attractiveness of migration.

Current agricultural transformation trends risk perpetuating inequities unless inclusion becomes central to policy design. Ensuring decent work across the sector requires addressing exploitative practices and prioritising the welfare of marginalised workers, like rural women.

Modern, and global agri-value chains, regulation of national labour laws, and effects on female employment

There is evidence to show that modern agribusiness practices and participation in global value chains, especially in export-led sectors like horticulture, or buyer-driven chains such as coffee and cocoa, tend to offer better conditions, and involve more smallholders. This may be driven by multinational firms prioritising reputational risk and market dominance. Ultimately, however the literature fails to conclude whether entering global AVC is

Young women: Findings from across Africa

Rural women and youth are consistently less likely to engage in paid work or self-employment in non-farm sectors compared to rural men and older workers, particularly in East Africa.

Youth inactivity in Africa varies widely, ranging from 23% in Tanzania to 63% in Nigeria, driven primarily by the pursuit of education and training and, for women particularly, child-rearing responsibilities. Between 2005-2013, the share of full-time equivalent jobs in agriculture for young adults declined significantly across Africa - except in Nigeria - reflecting broader shifts away from agricultural employment.

Where they are engaged with agriculture, young people in the region are more likely to experience underemployment.

beneficial for women, with variations between value chains, product lines, countries, regions, and beyond. While modern AVC do show potential for inclusivity and better job quality, they represent a small portion of AFS employment.

There is little evidence of widespread improvements for women due to regulatory measures either. There are positive impacts associated with certain value chains that adhere to decent labour standards or operate under strong regulatory environments, such as the fruit value chains in export-oriented agribusinesses in Kenya, South Africa, and Senegal. However, most women's jobs in AFS are informal and in some cases, regulations incentivise employers to avoid formal contracts with women, worsening their job security and working conditions. Informal subcontracting is already prevalent, concealing poor working conditions that must be addressed to ensure equitable benefits for all workers in AVCs.

Agri-food system interventions, enabling policies and their effects on female employment

The meta-study found seven intervention groups, and six enabling policies that can lead to increases in employment opportunities and/or improvements in the quality of employment. Below is a summary of the findings for the interventions where significant impact on female inclusivity was demonstrated. This includes digital innovations, mechanisation, and automation; food standards that include labour provisions; modern contracts, VC contracting, and flexible labour contracts; social protection combined with economic development; and collective action organisations.

Intervention groups

Adoption of mechanisation, automation, and digital innovations

Mechanisation and digital technologies are transforming labour dynamics in AVCs, offering potential benefits such as improved productivity and access to services for women. New technologies also offer potential opportunities to address gender gaps in AFS by enhancing women's productivity and bargaining power. However, unequal adoption could exacerbate existing disparities, with significant gaps already existing in female access and adoption of these technologies and opportunities. Unequal adoption could widen these existing employment and income disparities, keeping women in precarious and low-paid roles.

Research by FAO shows that automation can be a tool for poverty reduction, food security, and increased agricultural productivity, citing historical examples where early mechanisation led to job shifts rather than mass unemployment. This potential is contingent on making automation technologies accessible to smallholders and marginalised groups, such as women and youth. However, the literature focuses on on-farm innovations, providing little discussion on how automation is affecting logistics, trade, and agro-processing trade segments. As mentioned above, this is often where a majority of employees are women.

Food standards that include labour provisions

Studies on the impact of certification for AVC reveal mixed results for women, highlighting both potential benefits and significant limitations. The research focused heavily on Fairtrade and Global G.A.P certifications specifically.

The research showed that certified farms and cooperatives show little difference in wages or working conditions compared to non-certified counterparts, partly due to the challenges of implementing and monitoring standards effectively. High costs associated with certification and compliance were found to often offset the price benefits for producers. Smallholder farmers, particularly in situations with limited financial gain from certification, may struggle to afford higher wages.

Ethical standards frequently fail to reach the most vulnerable workers, including casual, migrant, and female labourers. While certification can enhance working conditions and inclusivity, their effectiveness depends heavily on the context, type of value chain, and local conditions. Certifications are generally more beneficial for male workers and those employed by well-resourced agribusinesses, as power imbalances within the value chain often lead to unequal benefits.

Regarding export-led value chains where these types of standards are most common, while private regulations and certifications can improve conditions for some workers, they often have little to no impact on women and sub-

contracted workers. As previously mentioned, subcontractors tend to be more vulnerable and less likely to benefit from such standards. Where certifications are adopted, power imbalances, such as those between retailers and producers, can still lead to institutional arrangements that prioritise the interests of more powerful actors over workers' welfare. This limits further any positive impacts for women.

For a wider, and more nuanced picture of the effects food standards can have on decent work, see our third paper in this guidance note series

Modern contract farming, VC contracting, and flexible labour contracts

Contract farming and value chain integration offer higher wages and productivity but, like many of the interventions included in the meta-study, predominantly benefit better-off men with greater asset endowments. Women are often confined to seasonal and precarious jobs where these kinds of contracts are not applicable.

Even so, the participation of smallholders in contract farming is influenced by factors such as education, asset base, proximity to infrastructure, land size, and experience. Accordingly, women and female-headed households often face disadvantages in accessing these contracts, which can exacerbate gender inequality. Gender roles and stereotypes further restrict women's participation in higher-skilled activities, like contract negotiation.

However, the overall impact of contract farming on the welfare of farmers and wage-earners is debated. While some research suggests that contracts can reduce autonomy and income due to the power of buyers, other studies highlight mixed effects on wages and conditions for salaried agricultural workers. Contract farming, particularly in buyer-oriented value chains, may lead to changes in the structure of the workforce and the broader community impacts include increased social differentiation and exclusion of poorer producers, including women, by contracting firms.

While contract farming and global value chains can drive economic independence and social inclusion, the outcomes are contingent on local regulation and existing inequalities. While women have significant representation in employment within export-oriented sectors in contexts like Senegal and India, this does not in itself lead to increased prosperity.

Regarding more general value chain contracting, the effects on wage equality and employment conditions for women vary, with some studies showing benefits such as reduced gender wage gaps and higher school enrolment among children of agro-industrial female workers. However, in line with overall AFS employment impact trends, the advantages are not uniform and depend on context, country, and the type of contract.

Enabling policies

Social protection interventions combined with economic development interventions

Social protection interventions are essential for supporting inclusive rural transformation and decent work, playing a critical role in enhancing household welfare. Social protection interventions help rural communities manage risks, alleviate deprivation, improve livelihoods, and promote socioeconomic inclusion and equality. These interventions are typically grouped into three main categories: protective measures (e.g., cash transfers and pensions), preventative measures (e.g. social insurance and health benefits), and promotional measures (e.g. economic incentive programmes and training).

The research shows significant benefits from linking social protection with agricultural programmes, finding that social assistance interventions can boost input use, farm output, and agricultural assets. These interventions indirectly support human capital development, encourage off-farm activities, and prevent harmful risk-coping strategies that could deplete household assets (e.g. falling into debt, selling livestock or other material assets such as equipment, early harvests (which are lower quality and realize less value leading to lower household incomes). While social protection has been associated with improving productivity, income, consumption, and food security for smallholders, the literature on its direct agricultural impacts remains limited.

Importantly, social protection has been proven to increase women's resilience, although gaps remain. For example, studies highlight that key agri-food worker groups, such as self-employed women, are often excluded from these programmes due to barriers in access, despite their critical need for such support.

Collective action organisations

Labour unions and farmers' organisations play significant roles in improving the conditions of agricultural workers and enhancing farm productivity. Labour unions can lead to higher wages, safer working conditions, and reduced workloads for agricultural labourers, while farmers' organisations contribute to increased incomes, better crop yields, and improved product quality. Collective action organisations can also facilitate participation in contract farming, lower transaction costs, and reduce power imbalances, potentially boosting profits for organised farmers.

However, the limited presence of unions and workers associations, particularly in rural Africa and other regions, hinders these benefits. Women's self-help groups, on the other hand, have shown positive outcomes for women's empowerment and access to credit. These self-help groups may also provide a life-line for younger women, as rural youth face significant barriers to participating in collective action organisations potentially further limiting their opportunities for engagement and development.

Knowledge gaps: Gender systems approaches

Addressing women's inclusion in AFS employment requires adopting gender systems approaches. While gender inequality and women's empowerment in rural labour markets are heavily researched topics - with a focus on gaps in productivity, income, wages, and working conditions - there is limited understanding of the underlying factors that contribute to these disparities. Specifically, more insight is needed into the endowment and structural determinants that drive gender gaps, and the gender systems shaping women's employment opportunities across AFS segments. These systems also influence how such employment affects women's welfare, empowerment, and overall development.

Understanding gender dynamics is essential for analysing trends in female employment within AVC, and for agri-food actors to take action to ensure equity especially for the most vulnerable (i.e. young rural women) within their own spheres of influence.

Section 2: A toolkit and good practices for addressing gender equality

Overview of the gender equity toolkit and its original purpose

A [2022 CGIAR-ISEAL scoping study](#) assessed gender integration across 14 standards in the agri-food sector and identified a range of barriers to translating intentions to action, including a lack of knowledge in designing and operationalising gender strategies and in collecting the right types of data related to gender equality. Sustainability systems' stakeholders requested support in identifying key entry points and best practices that would help them, whether they were at the start of their journey or further along in integrating gender equality considerations in their work. In response, a toolkit was developed to support sustainability systems and their partners to advance their thinking and actions around gender equality by compiling curated resources and practical case studies. It emphasises and builds on the existing knowledge and experiences of ISEAL members and showcases examples of wider initiatives and programmatic strategies from public and corporate practice through which agri-food actors can help advance various aspects of gender equality.

It is structured around three levels at which sustainability systems can tackle gender equality: at the organisational level; within standards and certifications; and through programmatic work. The toolkit also addresses data-related considerations needed to make progress on gender equality within and through sustainability systems.

Relevance to other agri-food actors

Like sustainability systems, all governmental and international institutions, as well as private sector entities recognise the importance of supporting gender equality, both as a fundamental human right and as a means to achieving other aspects of sustainability. A robust body of evidence supports the link between gender equality and positive impacts on the global economy, financial performance at individual corporate level, and societal change across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

There is widespread commitment from the UN institutions, governments and businesses to gender mainstreaming² in policies and programmes. Key accountability and reporting

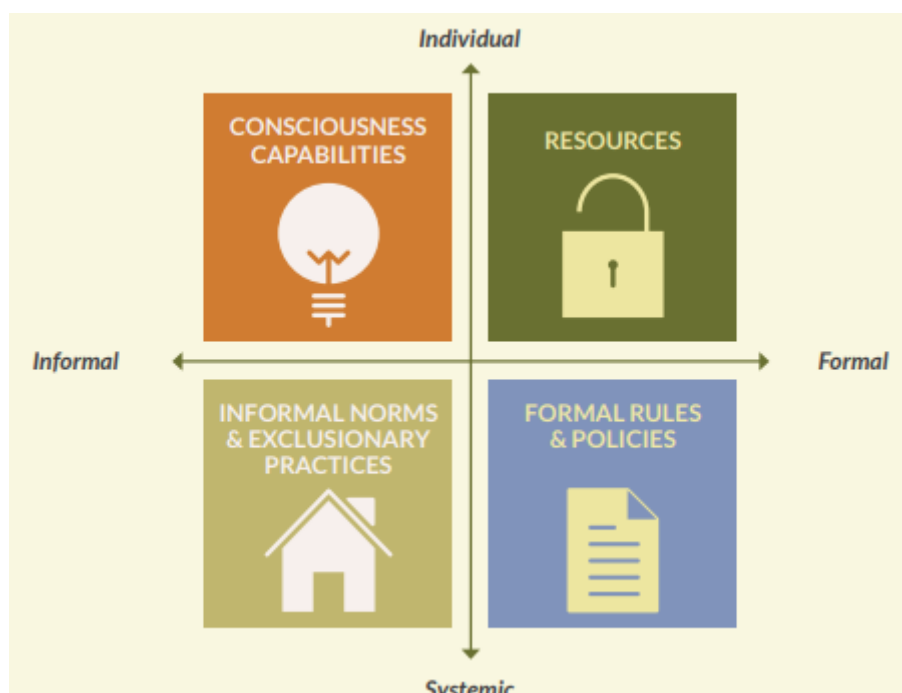


Figure 1: The Gender at Work framework

² Definition of gender mainstreaming: '...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. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.' Source: ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2

frameworks have been developed for the corporate and country levels to support this. However, the possibilities for organizations to benefit from the full transformative potential of gender mainstreaming remain to be fulfilled in many areas of development policy and practice.

[The Gender at Work Framework](#) (Figure 1) provides one useful way for agri-food actors to understand how to develop holistic strategies that address structural barriers to gender equality. It identifies four quadrants of change required to achieve gender equality: along the individual to systemic (or structural) and informal to formal axes.

Currently, interventions tend to target only individual-level changes (for example, including women producers in existing training or seeking to increase women's incomes) – the top half of the framework. These need to be complemented with approaches that target changing systems and structures – including discriminatory informal and formal institutions that limit all women, not just those women that are already visible to sustainability systems or companies and potentially receiving support. A gender transformative approach shifts the focus of programming strategies from 'empowering' individual women ('fixing women') to catalysing profound and lasting changes to women's rights ('changing systems'). This type of approach is explicit about transforming unequal power relations and the social institutions that perpetuate and reinforce gender inequalities.

Gender-transformative approaches aim to change the structures and power dynamics that underlie gender-based inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion. Such approaches go beyond working with symptoms to addressing systemic and structural causes such as gender norms, stereotypes, sociocultural attitudes and behaviour and power relations at all levels that reinforce inequality, discrimination, and exclusion. Gender transformative approaches are advocated for all stakeholders along the supply chain and government and international institutions alike to achieve lasting and profound changes³. The toolkit and good practice guidance draws on gender-transformative approaches for its recommendations and review of best practices that apply across diversity of actors and supply chain contexts.

Elements of a comprehensive gender transformative approach

Mainstreaming gender equality within organisations

Gender mainstreaming within the organisation must involve more than a technical fix or one-off intervention. It requires sustained efforts to change discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and organisational practice by embedding gender considerations into institutional policies and strategic plans. The three main steps to address gender equality at the organisational level are to 1) develop tailored gender strategies, 2) strengthen the internal capacities on gender equality and 3) ensure accountability on gender equality goals.

A robust gender strategy can increase the ability of organizations to address gender-specific challenges within their own organisation. Developing a gender strategy should entail, first, a thorough evidence-based assessment of the state of play related to gender equality. This may involve assessing gender-related data (gender pay gaps or relative representation of men and women in management or decision-making roles) and workplace policies and processes. Results from the assessment should inform the development of a gender strategy or a gender equality plan. There are several resources that provide step-by-step guidance for setting a [gender strategy in the public sector](#) from the European Institute of Gender Equality and for businesses in male dominated industries to complete [a workplace gender equality assessment and identify best practices](#) by USAID.

Building internal capacity and buy-in is crucial for organisations seeking to achieve a more equitable workplace environment that ultimately supports gender equality outcomes. Including employees in a collaborative process for planning and implementing the strategy can foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility. To help with capacity-building, organizations are advised to hire a dedicated gender advisor with well-defined terms of

³ More on Gender Transformative approaches and best practice for different stakeholders can be found in UN Women Handbook on gender mainstreaming for gender equality (2022) at www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Handbook-on-gender-mainstreaming-for-gender-equality-results-en.pdf

reference, integrate them well in the organisation, make sure they have explicit support from management and the necessary access to organisational processes, data and financial resources to achieve meaningful impact. A detailed guidance is available by UN Women in the [Handbook on gender mainstreaming for gender equality results](#).

Ultimately, establishing clear accountability mechanisms and reporting frameworks to accompany a gender strategy helps to track its implementation and fosters a culture of transparency and responsibility towards gender equality within an organisation. Some of the best practices in this respect emphasise the importance of setting specific performance indicators related to expected gender outcomes, reporting publicly on gender-disaggregated data and sharing lessons learned. This should be conducted alongside regularly reviewing and updating the gender strategy or action plan based on feedback, learning and evolving best practice. Critical for success of the gender strategy is leadership accountability, which can be strengthened by providing ongoing training and capacity-building to mid-and senior management level, raising awareness of gender issues, sharing metrics and indicators from gender assessments, and tackling structural barriers such as unconscious gender bias.

For the enforcement of accountability, it is also key to develop and disseminate clear policies outlining expectations related to gender equality (e.g., anti-discrimination policies and recruitment practices) which reduce risks of gender-based discrimination within the organisation and increase staff commitment to the organisation's gender strategy. Finally, it is necessary to create channels for employees to voice concerns that may arise from heightened awareness on gender issues, and feedback on gender-related initiatives undertaken by the organisation to ensure they meet the needs of those affected. Best practice and examples of accountability framework reports can be found in [UN Women Accountability Framework for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) (2020).

Promoting gender equality (in various organisational activities)

As we saw with numerous interventions reviewed earlier, while female employment and participation in farm production and postharvest processes is growing, it remains constrained by cultural and structural barriers. Similarly, evidence suggests that sustainability systems have had mixed impact on redressing gender inequalities. This is unsurprising, since gender inequality is pervasive and not so easily shifted, with deeply entrenched root causes that manifest in multiple and reinforcing ways. There is the need for programmatic interventions that tackle different dimensions of (in)equality in the lives of value chain actors:

1. Minimum, 'do no harm' requirements:

In the design and implementation of various programmes and projects, agri-food stakeholders should at a minimum strive to institute specific requirements on anti-discrimination and equality of treatment, gender-specific fair working conditions and address violence and harassment through appropriate policies and accountability mechanisms.

Examples of good practices that sustainability systems have embedded as requirements in their certification programmes and that any organisation can adopt and integrate into their project /programmatic activities, include:

- ✓ Introducing a policy that specifies workers should not be subjected to discrimination in recruitment, promotion, access to training, remuneration, allocation of work, termination of employment, retirement or other activities
- ✓ Including a procedure for cases of sexual harassment in grievance procedures, with a designated woman or women's committee directly linked to senior manager
- ✓ Conducting proper due diligence on human rights risks and impacts including consultation with vulnerable groups including women, who must be meaningfully engaged during the assessment
- ✓ Introducing a formal policy that prohibits pregnant and nursing women from participating in hazardous work
- ✓ Including special accommodations for pregnant and nursing women, e.g., a separate space to breastfeed and breastfeeding breaks.

2. Support for better representation in organisations and empowering women in the enabling environment

At the farm / processing facility level, this can include ensuring that various work committees include representation of diverse groups, that grievance committees are gender-sensitive and that there is a specific gender committee at farms. At an organisational level, gender equality can be promoted through employment practice while organizations can also enhance the enabling environment for empowering women. Some examples from ISEAL's [guidance on good practices](#) include:

- ✓ Promoting gender equality in employment practices, training opportunities, awarding of contracts, processes of engagement and management activities
- ✓ Building capacities of women (through skills training and education) as well as training staff and key personnel to be able to adhere to relevant laws and policies or give special attention to women's empowerment.
- ✓ Reviewing supplier code's requirements, funding and project support for adequate training, capacity building, guidance, encouragement and assistance on women empowerment
- ✓ Providing support for crèche facilities for workers' children either inside or outside the premises
- ✓ Training doctors, nurses and key personnel among security staff, managers or others on how to recognise signs of gender-based violence and understanding of relevant laws and organisational policies
- ✓ Conducting community-based women's empowerment training, covering topics such as developing business skills, vocational trainings and life skills, legal rights and civic education.

3. Programmatic work to address specific systemic gender equality issues

✓ Strengthening women's capacities and leadership

Agri-food actors can support initiatives or pilot projects that provide more targeted skills training or financing for women producers and entrepreneurs. The toolkit elaborates on good practices coming from sustainability systems such as [Fairtrade's Women's Schools of Leadership](#). This is an example of a more holistic approach, combining targeted training on leadership with gender awareness or critical consciousness-raising, technical farming skills and economic investment in women's businesses and market access

✓ Addressing women's unpaid care work

Globally, women do 75% of all unpaid care and domestic work, making it harder for them to find decent work and effectively participate in and benefit from supply chains. Their unpaid work limits their time and mobility to be able to engage in paid work, or to join training activities or participate in producers' or workers' organisations.

Agri-food actors are advised to develop strategies to invest in time- and labour-saving equipment and services or to address the underlying social norms and attitudes that reinforce women's heavy responsibilities for unpaid care. [The Rapid Care Analysis Toolkit](#) of Oxfam is a rapid and participatory assessment tool that gathers evidence on unpaid care work to promote the recognition of care work and to identify practical interventions. This new version is specifically targeted at the private sector.

Addressing workers' unpaid care and domestic work is integral to upholding labour rights and protecting and promoting the human rights of workers in supply chains. It can also increase women's economic opportunities, productivity and earnings, as well as their wellbeing.

✓ Preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls

[UN Women's Global Women's Safety Framework in Rural Spaces](#) offers guidance for sustainability systems, producers, women's organisations, authorities and other stakeholders to support value chain actors to better

understand violence against women and girls, its causes, measures to protect against it, and its impacts on women, communities and businesses. Actions to prevent sexual harassment and violence against women and girls can include, among others, dialogues at community (and other) levels to discuss the issue and prompt critical reflection, creating strong redress mechanisms within value chains and industries, promoting women's economic independence, health and safety, and collaboration with public programmes to establish safe working and living conditions for women.

Generating and using data on gender equality

For sustainability systems and various agri-food actors working on gender equality, gender-disaggregated data is necessary to bring visibility to gender inequality issues in supply chains. Furthermore, regularly collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data is critical to understand what strategies and interventions are working, and track progress against gender equality targets. Insights from monitoring and evaluation can support more gender-responsive policy and programme development over time.

A gender-sensitive **value chain analysis** helps to identify constraints to achieving gender equality. Analyses can help to understand underlying causes of inequalities along the value chain and to identify strategies that can achieve both economic and social goals. FAO's publication [Developing gender-sensitive value chains](#) (2016) provides a framework as well as practical tools, guiding questions, and additional resources to conduct such an analysis.

The World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) develops free and publicly available [resources](#), including insights rankings, data and methodologies to assess the current state of gender-related issues in the private sector and evaluate progress on an annual basis. **Benchmarks** are developed to measure and compare company performance on an array of SDGs, including SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender-responsive monitoring assesses the outcomes and impacts of initiatives for women, men, girls and boys and the contribution of strategies for advancing gender equality and empowerment. A key resource that can support in the identification of metrics and appropriate strategy for organisations is the guidance document [Gender-Responsive Monitoring Approaches for Agrifood Stakeholders](#). It provides an overview of gender-responsive monitoring, including suggested steps and elements for those seeking to develop or improve their monitoring approaches. It also offers a curated shortlist of turnkey resources appropriate for different agrifood stakeholders. Furthermore, it introduces the Gender Equality in Agrifood Systems: Indicator List (GEASIL), a list of approximately 400 illustrative indicators that can be used to assemble a tailored set of indicators on gender equality.

Recommendations

Below is a summary of actions explored in this section. These recommendations are mostly relevant to larger organisations within the commercial agri-food value chain as such organisations have the capacity to begin gender mainstreaming, with the technical support from NGOs operating in the area, and the necessary influence within the value chain to encourage smaller actors to take similar approaches. Of course, smaller organisations and individuals are encouraged to consider implementing these recommendations, especially as part of a collaborative, grass-roots gender-transformative approach.

1. Develop a tailored gender strategy

- Agri-food value chain organisations should develop and deploy a gender strategy. This should be informed by a thorough assessment of how policies and processes impact on gender equality, and a review of the associated data (e.g. gender pay gaps).
- Organisations should seek a collaborative process that includes employees in planning for and implementing the strategy. Larger organisations should also consider hiring a dedicated gender advisor.
- Readers from public sector organisations should refer to the [European Institute of Gender Equality's gender strategy resources](#). Readers from industry should consider the [tailored resources on workplace gender equality assessments](#) from USAID. All organisations should refer to the [Handbook on gender mainstreaming for gender equality results](#) from UN Women.

2. Strengthen internal organizational capacities on gender equality and contribute to gender mainstreaming in the enabling environment

- Organisations should implement minimum 'do no harm' requirements. Common examples from voluntary sustainability systems are provided earlier in section 2. As a minimum this should include supporting better representation of women through gender-sensitive policies and employment practices.
- Organisations should contribute to gender mainstreaming in the enabling environment by contributing to the strengthening of women's capacities' and leadership; addressing women's unpaid care work; and preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls. Related activities can look like providing direct support for childcare facilities, influencing suppliers and buyers, and contributing to community-based training of stakeholders on a range of issues from developing business skills to recognizing signs of gender-based violence.

3. Ensure accountability on gender equality goals

- Organisations should prioritise establishing clear accountability mechanisms and reporting frameworks.
- Organisations should set specific performance indicators related to expected gender outcomes, reporting publicly on the generated gender-disaggregated data, sharing lessons learned, and regularly review and update the gender strategy or action plan.
- Leadership accountability can be strengthened by providing ongoing training and capacity-building to mid- and senior-level management. This could cover raising awareness of gender issues, sharing metrics and indicators from gender assessments, and tackling structural barriers such as unconscious gender bias.
- Clear policies should also be developed and disseminated outlining expectations related to gender equality (e.g. anti-discrimination policies and recruitment practices).
- Organisations should create channels for employees to voice concerns that may arise from heightened awareness on gender issues, and feedback on gender-related initiatives undertaken by the organization. Best practice and examples of accountability framework reports can be found in the [Accountability Framework for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#) from UN Women.

4. Generate and use data on gender equality

- Organisations should begin to produce gender-disaggregated data to support more gender-responsive policy and programme development, or check progress on their gender strategy. An initial dataset should be produced in the development of the strategy itself.
- Larger organisations could conduct a gender-sensitive value chain analysis and share findings with smaller actors (such as partners, buyers, and suppliers), allowing both to identify strategies that can achieve both economic and social goals.
- For additional information and tools, actors should see FAO's [Developing gender-sensitive value chains](#); the World Benchmarking Alliance's (WBA) [free and publicly available resources](#); and the [Gender Responsive Monitoring Approaches for Agrifood Stakeholders](#) from Alliance Bioversity & CIAT, and Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN). The latter provides turnkey resources for different agri-food stakeholders.

For questions or feedback, please write to Naomi Black at evidensia@isealalliance.org

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Evidensia is the largest online repository for credible evidence on the impact of market-based sustainability tools. We partner with organizations, undertake synthesis research, and develop digestible summaries, such as this to increase uptake of credible evidence in decision-making for business, policy, research, and civil society audiences. For more information and to explore our resources, please visit www.evidensia.eco

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