



**Self Help  
Africa**

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# Self Help Africa's approach to **Adopting a Gender Lens** in Business

[selfhelpafrica.org](http://selfhelpafrica.org)



Workers at The Real IPM Company, Kenya, which produces and sells biocontrol and bio-fertilisers

## Rationale

The facilitation of dynamic and competitive businesses is a priority in developed and emerging economies as a crucial engine of economic growth and job creation. In an increasingly competitive and global operating environment, gender equality will be one of the aspects critical to businesses success. Research shows that groups with diverse perspectives and flexibility in thinking almost always outperform homogeneous groups in the business environment and lead to higher levels of creativity, innovation and success<sup>1</sup>. Adopting a gender lens within business and enterprise programming has proved to be an effective strategy which generates a positive impact on businesses as well as on the society they provide for<sup>2</sup>.

### 1. Gender Equality Improves Business Performance

Adopting a gender lens in business facilitates a better business understanding of how to appeal to both genders as customers, and what products and services women and men need and want. This can help businesses create new markets, increase market share, and increase margins and profit. In

2016 a study analysing results from 21,980 publicly traded companies in 91 countries demonstrated that companies with 30% women in their leadership composition added 6% to their net margin, and another study by Credit Suisse research found that companies with at least one female director had better *share price performances* than those without women directorship roles<sup>3</sup>. Companies with women at the top “make better decisions, produce better products and retain several key business advantages over more homogeneous companies. Evidence suggests that commercial teams that reflect the demographic characteristics of the market are better positioned to respond to changing consumer needs and that products developed in this way can better respond to the needs of the consumer base”<sup>4</sup>.

Gender inclusion then has the power to generate positive business impacts, including increased efficiency and market share, improved margins, increased employee satisfaction and retention and increased effectiveness and efficiency across value chains.

<sup>1</sup> UK Aid, Value for Women, Shell Foundation, A Business-First Approach to Gender Inclusion, How to Think about Gender Inclusion in Small and Medium Enterprise Operations, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

## 2. It's the Right Thing to do

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. This has been widely recognised by the international community and by the UN through, among others, the adoption of Sustainable Goal 5 and the *Leave No-One Behind* approach in Agenda 2030.<sup>5</sup>

- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate
- 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
- 5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences
  - 5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws
  - 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
  - 5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels



Tegene Kelemow, Wolenchiti Village, Ethiopia

## The Challenge

Integrating gender equality in business is however extremely challenging due to a number of factors. In particular, a report by the World Bank<sup>6</sup> outlines 9 factors holding back women's full integration in business in Africa, namely

1. Legal discrimination
2. Social Norms
3. Risk of gender-based violence
4. Education and skills gap
5. Confidence and risk preferences
6. Finance and assets
7. Access to networks and information
8. Household allocation of productive resources
9. Time constraints and care.

Addressing these barriers implies challenging structural discrimination and social norms. While this is very difficult, businesses are becoming much more aware of the importance of integrating diversity and inclusion within the business agenda in order to achieve better outcomes for companies and society at large.

<sup>5</sup> *Transforming Our World: the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development*, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank Group, *Profiting from Parity: Unlocking the Potential of Women's Business in Africa*, 2019, available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31421>

# Gender inclusive business

## Some definitions

A Gender inclusive business model operates with the dual purpose of generating a reasonable profit and having a tangible effect on low-income people's welfare. Moreover, it promotes women's economic empowerment by considering women as beneficiaries, implicitly or explicitly.<sup>7</sup> The implicit beneficiary business model provides services or products in areas where women often can be disadvantaged, but does not necessarily address women's empowerment specifically and does little to empower them directly. In contrast, the explicit beneficiary business model takes measures to target women specifically in creating economic opportunity. Examples include recruiting women as distributors, designing career paths for women, creating a woman-friendly work environment, and providing access to goods and services specifically designed for the needs of women, such as reproductive care or financial services for women's businesses.<sup>8</sup>

**Women-led businesses** are businesses in which at least one of the following is true:

- The key decision-maker is a woman / at least two women hold key senior management decision making positions e.g. Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Chief Finance Officer.
- The enterprise is at least 51% owned by women
- 30% or more of board of directors are women



## The UN Global Compact – Equity Means Business

The UN Global Compact is a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. In 2010, the UN Global Compact, in partnership with UN Women, launched the Women's Empowerment Principles – seven principles for business on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. Sub-titled **Equality Means Business**, the Principles emphasised the business case for corporate action to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and are informed by real-life business practices and input gathered from across the globe<sup>9</sup>. The principles seek to lead the way towards best practice by elaborating the gender dimension of good corporate citizenship and businesses role in sustainable development. The principles are:

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
7. Measure and publicly report on progress in achieving gender equality.

As well as being a useful guide for business, it is hoped the principles will inform other stakeholders, particularly governments, in their engagement with business.

<sup>7</sup> Development Asia, *Making Inclusive Business Inclusive for Women*, <https://development.asia/insight/making-inclusive-business-inclusive-women>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> [www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org).

# SHA's Understanding of Gender Integration in Business

**Who we work with:** For Self Help Africa, adopting a gender lens in business means supporting businesses to undertake three or more of the following:

## Internally to the company

1. Ensure fair and comparable wages, hours, and benefits, including retirement benefits for comparable work regardless of gender.
2. Undertake recruitment and retention campaigns that target women and men.
3. Ensure both women and men participate in recruitment panels.
4. Encourage the employment of women and men in occupations that are not normally considered “typical” for their gender.
5. Prohibit and prevent all forms of violence in the workplace, including verbal, physical and sexual harassment.
6. Promote women’s leadership: women-led enterprises have particularly high potential for social impact.
7. Promote women into management positions, supporting women’s participation in cooperatives. Mentoring/coaching.

8. Introduce internal policies and practices promoting gender diversity and workplace equity within the organization. (Recruitment of women in non-traditional jobs, training and education for women, Improving transportation to and from work, childcare.)
9. Strengthen the way in which business models reflect inclusion and diversity across operations. (Gendered Value Chain analysis, more distribution/collection centres, women as sales agents, financial analysis).

## Externally to society

10. Address gender inequalities including gender biases in investment decision-making.
11. Focus on building a business case for gender inclusion
12. Design customised gender strategies focused on solving business challenges with a gender lens.
13. Provide and invest in products and services that intentionally seek to close gender gaps or that are designed to meet the specific needs of women or girls.



Mango Processing in Malawi

## Our Approach

**Our approach will be a bottom-up business-first approach;** this approach builds on a deep understanding of the business model and its challenges and designs customised gender strategies focused on solving business challenges with a gender lens. The approach aims to engage businesses by focusing on their needs as the starting point and on the employment and leadership of women as well as on human resource practices and policies. Self Help Africa endeavours to adopt a holistic approach, analysing business processes for gender inclusion opportunities, product design, value proposition, sales, marketing, customer segmentation as well as staff care and human resources.

## Our Offering for Businesses

Our support lies in:

### 1. Gender analysis support

SHA uses a gender scoring tool to establish the extent to which businesses are gender inclusive. To conduct the analysis, SHA modified for its own purpose a tool to assess the status of gender inclusivity within the businesses. In addition, businesses can also conduct a self-assessment using tools such as The Gender Inclusion Self-assessment Tool which is an online resource developed by Value for Women to help businesses track improvements through the adoption of new policies, systems and practices, and identify gaps and opportunities for deepening their focus on gender inclusion.<sup>10</sup> Alternatively, the Women's Empowerment Principles tool can be used which focuses across a wide spectrum of a company's activities, from within its workforce, through its value chain, to its customers and more broadly in the wider community.

### 2. Technical Assistance

SHA provides technical assistance to businesses by encouraging them to apply a gender lens to their business challenges especially around their business strategies, sourcing models (supporting women producers; buying more from women), internal processes (human resources policies – work environment) distribution and markets (products and services). Organisations that we can collaborate with on this agenda include:

i) the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) that provides a VALUE4HER platform aimed at increasing value for women from agribusinesses through market access, improving knowledge, skills and networks and global



advocacy aimed at addressing some of the key barriers for women's empowerment in agriculture;<sup>11</sup> and

ii) WEConnect International, a corporate-led non-profit and helps build sustainable communities and economic growth by empowering women business owners to succeed in global markets.

Finally, creating networks of mutual support and peer learning among businesses led by women will be encouraged, such as an association of women in agriculture.

### 3. Investment linkage (matchmaking)

SHA links businesses to impact investors, Angel Investors and donors who are interested in gender lens investing.

### 4. Incentives and Recognition

In order to incentivize businesses to incorporate a gender lens, Self Help Africa can provide:

- Awards such as best SHA gender inclusive businesses;
- Complementary technical assistance
- Incorporate into the evaluation criteria for selection a specific weighting for women led business.

**Commitment:** SHA will encourage supported businesses to make public commitments for gender equality and women's empowerment by signing the UN Global Compact's Women's Empowerment Principles CEO statement of support or other equivalent.

<sup>10</sup> UK Aid, Value for Women, Shell Foundation, A Business-First Approach to Gender Inclusion, How to Think about Gender Inclusion in Small and Medium Enterprise Operations, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> www.WEConnectInternational.org; Since 2009 it has provided certification, resources, mentoring and peer and corporate connections to businesses that are at least 51 percent owned, managed and controlled by one or more women.

# The pathway to gender inclusion



## Achievable and measurable targets

Overly ambitious or aspirational targets are often less likely to be achieved which can have a negative impact and reduce the motivation to change. Hence the Country Programme targets below while not being overly ambitious can be built upon.

- 30% of businesses pledge to have 50% female leadership;
- 40% of businesses increase the percentage of women hired to at least 40%;
- 30% of businesses have reviewed and where necessary amended policies and processes to encourage gender equality, including those relating to recruitment and selection, performance management, pay and remuneration, training and development, talent identification, leadership capability models and career structures.

By adopting a gender lens, companies working with SHA will experience a positive impact on their businesses as well as on the society they provide for.



Farmers in the Oromia Region, Abichu District, Ethiopia



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