GEM for Business Growth: Gendered Social Recommendations

The social component is one of three lenses that comprise the Gender Equality Mainstreaming (GEM) Framework. The assessment allows a rating of your company along the spectrum below with recommendations on how to mainstream gender equality in a company’s workforce, customer base and supply chain.

Maximizing women’s participation in business is not just the right thing to do, it also makes good business sense. Advancing women’s equality could add as much as $28 trillion to global annual GDP by 2025 (McKinsey, 2015). Women as employees, customers and suppliers represent a powerful source of economic growth that is frequently overlooked and underleveraged by businesses. There are many business benefits to hiring and promoting women including increasing the competitiveness of a company’s talent pool, raising the level of creativity and innovation through gender diverse work teams (PwC, 2017), and improving access to more capital and new investors.

Looking beyond employees, women as consumers have immense purchasing power and influence, especially in the food, fitness, beauty and apparel markets (HBR, 2009). Women currently control about $20 trillion in annual consumer spending and are projected to control nearly 75% of consumer discretionary spending worldwide by 2028 (Ernst & Young, 2013). As the primary buyer for people in their networks, women consumers have a multiplier effect. Companies who capitalize on this multiplier benefit from increased sales, customer loyalty, and expanded market share (Forbes, 2015).

Purchasing products from women suppliers can diversify sourcing and mitigate supply chain risks like product unavailability. Companies that source from multiple suppliers spend on average 20% less on their buying operations (Hackett, 2017).

Businesses like PT Cisarua Mountain Dairy (Cimory) are yielding the commercial benefits of hiring and advancing women. Cimory, a leading producer of dairy products in Indonesia, launched a direct-to-consumer sales program that recruits and trains low-income women as sales agents. While dairy is not inherently a women’s product category, Cimory chose to employ women sales agents to engage customers with a more personalised brand experience, increase sales and capture larger profit margins. Since its launch, the women sales agent program now represents 14% of Cimory’s total sales and grew by 30% in the previous year alone (MEDA, 2017).
Gender Explorer

It is likely that your company employs more male staff across job levels and departments. Your company’s strategy to recruit and promote employees may overlook women as viable candidates to fill new job openings, especially at the senior management level. Since your company’s products and services are not designed and marketed specifically for women, the market potential of the female customer segment is largely unrealized. In addition, your company may not diversify its procurement to reach both women and men suppliers.

The following tips and resources can help you get started on upgrading your company’s workforce, customer and supplier practices while improving gender equality:

Employees

- **Increase the gender diversity of your company’s employees.** Begin by measuring the number of women and men employees at various levels and departments. You can use measurement as a starting point to understand where women and men are least represented in your company. The gender gaps identified can be explored further through discussions on Human Resources (HR) practices with your staff and tracking your company’s employee trends over time, and ultimately addressed through a corrective action plan.

- **Evaluate your company’s current recruitment practices.** Assess whether these practices present a disadvantage to female job candidates. Using tools like the Gender Decoder for Job Apps can help you ensure that vacant roles appeal equally to both sexes by focusing on topics like credentials, rather than personal characteristics.

- **Examine how your company recruits new staff.** For instance, on your company’s job applications, ask candidates how they learned about the vacancy. Then breakdown the responses by gender. In some cases, male candidates may hear of job openings through their informal networks, whereas female applicants might learn of vacancies through more public areas (e.g., online third-party job board). Obtaining this data allows your company to adjust its job posting strategy to better reach both women and men talent pools.

- **Explore formal partnerships with training institutes and colleges that have a high number of women graduates.** This helps companies access a larger labour market, as well as strengthen their reputation as a woman-friendly employer. In India, a microfinance institution entered agreements with three training institutes, where the company defined specific targets to increase recruitment of top female talent.

- **Evaluate certain staffing practices.** Assess whether current practices may be limiting women from joining or advancing in your company. For example, if a business requires its staff to always be in the office during regular working hours, this policy may inadvertently prevent women from applying for positions. The COVID-19 pandemic has further changed workplace practices with adoption of more virtual meetings. A 2021 report on [women in the workplace statistics you need to know](#) found that 45% of women business leaders find it difficult for women to speak in virtual meetings. To help attract and retain more women employees, explore implementing more gender inclusive workplace practices, such as flexible working hours or on-site childcare. The [UN WEPs tool](https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-business) offers more ideas on creating an inclusive workplace.

- **Retain top female talent by creating professional development programs that are tailor-made for women.** For instance, Women’s World Banking offers a [suite of leadership development programs](https://www.womenworldbanking.org/) that not only equip women with the skills and confidence to move up in their organization, but also pair women with an executive sponsor who will advocate for their career advancement.
Undertake online self-assessments specific to your sector to learn more. For agri-businesses, consider the Value For Women [https://giabiz.v4w.org/] Gender Inclusion Assessment for Agri-businesses. The self-assessment developed in collaboration with the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs and Walmart Foundation further assesses business operations from a gender perspective at three levels: human capital, productivity management, and market. The tool walks businesses through a three-step process to collect data about where women are within agribusiness operations, provide a report analyzing the data showing gender gaps in women and men participation as employees and suppliers, as well as highlighting the policies, practices and systems that should be in place for a business to support gender inclusion. Finally, the report will provide recommendations on action steps businesses can take towards increasing women’s inclusion across core business areas.

Customers

Disaggregate customer data by women and men. The use of Customer Relationship Management platforms can help you measure, analyze and generate highly effective marketing strategies that respond to the gender-specific needs of your customers. Dove used a series of impactful data gathering campaigns to uncover insights into the wants, needs and behaviours of women customers.

Think of creative ways to make your company’s products more appealing to women customers, even if they are not specifically designed for women. For instance, Ford Motor Company recognized that its advertisements for the Windstar van needed to be more women-friendly to increase sales to women. Its decision to hire more women sales agents and include women designers and engineers in its ads led to a 1% increase in sales of the Windstar van by women customers as compared to the previous year. In another company, there was a 2x increase in sales by women agents selling household use clean energy products once a gender lens was applied to sales training.

Suppliers

Determine the number of women and men suppliers that your company currently sources from. To develop a more gender-balanced supply chain, it’s helpful to first determine the number of women and men suppliers that your company is currently sourcing from. The Savannah Fruits Company sources shea butter from 40 women’s groups representing about 5000 women farmers. Creating employment for women in the supply chain can attract international buyers like the Sundial Brand, who sources shea butter from Savannah.

Explore opportunities to increase procurement from women entrepreneurs. The Women’s Business Enterprise National Council can help your company locate suppliers based in the United States, while WEConnect International can connect your company connect with globally based suppliers.

Consider forming business ties with companies that have a gender equality strategy for their own suppliers. For instance, if your company sources from multinationals, the Hershey Company ensures that it only sources raw shea from suppliers who pay fair wages to rural African women farmers by agreeing to the principles of the Global Shea Alliance and enforcing its own Supplier Code of Code. Retail stores that sell Hershey products are thus assured that they are participating in a women-friendly supply chain.
Gender Aware

Your business understands that women are influential drivers of business performance. You have taken steps towards including women in company operations, whether it is through hiring and retaining female staff, targeting female customers, or sourcing from women-owned enterprises. Despite these advances, your business has not yet taken full advantage of women’s contributions as employees, customers, and suppliers.

We commend your company on its progress towards incorporating gender within company practices with employees, customers and suppliers. To support you in your journey towards greater gender inclusion, we have included the following tips and resources:

**Employees**

- **Increase the gender diversity of your company’s employees.** Measure the number of women and men employees at various levels and departments to understand where women and men are least represented in the company. Combine this information with data captured in employee records (e.g., performance review sheets, and/or employee exit forms) and interviews with employees from different levels and departments to understand how men and women experience promotions, recruitment, compensation in your company differently.

- **Adopt new and creative ways to recruit non-traditional candidates.** Think creatively about how your company could recruit candidates who lack the traditional prerequisites but show an aptitude for being a high performer. For instance, [Andela](https://www.andela.com) is a company that trains unskilled African women to work in technology-focused roles in multinational firms.

- **Establish a gender training program to educate your company’s employees on the benefits of a diverse workforce.** This information can be embedded within existing job training or delivered as a standalone program. For example, Nestle Middle East created a [diversity and inclusion training workplace program](https://www.nestle-middleeast.com) that promotes the importance of eliminating unconscious biases and upholding an inclusive workplace environment. Partner with organizations such as [Value For Women](https://www.valueforwomen.org) who develop and provide gender training for investors, staff of financial institutions and banks, businesses and women entrepreneurs.

- **Set up several communication channels for women and men employees to provide feedback on your company’s HR practices.** For example, a confidential feedback system helps employees submit grievances and complaints on sensitive subjects, such as sexual harassment and discrimination. Other channels include holding regular town hall meetings, conducting annual employee satisfaction surveys and facilitating in-person employee feedback sessions.

- **Offer professional development programs to help aspiring female leaders boost their leadership skills.** For instance, [The Principle Financial Group](https://www.theprinciplefinancialgroup.com) has created a job shadowing program to connect high potential women with opportunities to work alongside company leaders. Career development programs can also equip women staff with the technical skills necessary to move up your company’s hierarchy.

- **Standardize your human resource practices to reduce any biases in decision-making.** For example, [PwC UK](https://www.pwc.co.uk) excluded “selling experience” where it was not necessary for applicants to have this type of professional experience and removed any references to “masculine language” in its job descriptions. It also ensured that interview panels have at least one female or ethnic minority partner are present. Using a standardized performance rubric may also help your company’s managers evaluate their team members more fairly.
Implement inclusive workforce practices to help women join and advance in your company. Credit Suisse created the Real Returns Program, a 12-week initiative that allows professionals who have taken a career break (e.g., maternity leave) to ramp up their skills, increase their professional network and boost their confidence about returning to the workforce. In 2016-2017, Credit Suisse India achieved an 80% conversion rate of program participants returning back to the firm full-time once their leave was complete.

Customers

Pilot and refine your marketing strategies to target subsets of women consumers. This will capture greater market share. For example, Nike has created a new product category; an athletic hijab to attract more Muslim women customers to its existing athleticwear line. Nike worked with Muslim women to stress test the product, ensuring it met their expectations prior to launch.

Follow and track gendered consumer trends. Use resources like trendwatching.com and BlogHer. Contemplate how these trends might influence your company’s product design, price point, distribution and promotion to better address women’s unique customer demands. For instance, PT Cisarua Mountain Dairy (Cimory) is a leading producer of dairy products in Indonesia that saw an opportunity to reach more women consumers by switching to a direct-to-consumer approach. Since its launch, the program, which employs women sales agents, now represents 14% of Cimory’s total sales and grew by 30% in the previous year alone (MEDA, 2017).

Suppliers

Develop actions to improve gender diversity among your company’s suppliers. This should be based on your measurement and tracking of women and men suppliers that your company is currently sourcing from. Your company will likely find that this exercise helps better manage supply chain risk and reduce costs.

Improve the gender diversity of your company’s supply chain. This can offer a variety of business benefits, such as the reduced likelihood of stock-outs. The Women’s Business Enterprise National Council can help you locate suppliers which are based in the United States, while WEConnect International can you connect with globally based suppliers.

Find new and creative ways to define and reach women suppliers. Whether your company sources from individual or large-scale suppliers will impact the way in which you measure and implement plans to diversify procurement. Businesses like agricultural processors that procure from small producers may find it easier to target women suppliers. However, companies sourcing from larger businesses – where it is not possible to identify gender – may need to find creative ways to define women suppliers. The UN Women offers a helpful guide for defining women-owned and operated suppliers and strategies to boost procurement.
Gender Strategic

Your company strategically engages women as employees, customers, and suppliers to achieve superior business performance. Your company has a gender diverse workforce throughout job levels and positions. You offer inclusive employee options that work for women and men, such as flexible work arrangements and the provision of childcare benefits. Your company targets women and men both as customers and suppliers through gender responsive marketing plans and procurement practices.

We commend you on your leadership in mainstreaming gender equality in employee, customer, and supplier practices. To support you to continually improve gender equality, we have included the following tips and resources:

Employees

- **Enhance your company’s existing employee training programs.** This can include integration of gender within the existing training curriculum. For instance, Portea, a healthcare company in India, delivered a happiness training to women and men junior staff, which included job skills training alongside gender sensitive topics like work-life balance and personal financial management.

- **Mobilize the public around your company’s gender equality vision and strategy.** Publicly setting targets related to your gender equality initiatives can enhance company reputation. Tata Steel announced it would like its workforce to increase from 11% to 20% female by 2020. To achieve this, Tata Steel partnered with training institutes to source top female talent, as well as hire experienced female professionals to fill in as project leads to cover women on maternity leave. In addition, companies can initiate public awareness campaigns. Tata Steel used the Twitter hashtags #steelheroes and #DayoftheGirl to stimulate a dialogue and highlight real-life examples of how gender focused recruitment allows it to tap into a wider talent pool.

- **Encourage your company’s women leaders to speak in public forums to elevate women as role models in business.** For instance, Wipro launched the Women of Wipro program which encourages their women leaders to participate in technology forums to raise their profile across the organization. Wipro more recently developed a holistic program for the inclusion of employees with disabilities, which they refer to as the CREATE framework (Career, Recruit, Engage, Accessibility, Train, and Enable).

- **Follow international trends related to gender diversity and women’s empowerment to identify new business opportunities.** In the wake of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, learn more about global efforts to encourage women’s economic empowerment through data sets like the Global Gender Gap Report 2021. Complement your data-driven learning by reading the Women’s Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business Report.

Customers

- **Analyze business performance indicators by gender.** This will provide advanced insights about your customers, such as disaggregating profit margin by repeat women and men customers, reviewing sales of products and services by women vs. men, considering women and men customer satisfaction rates, etc.

- **Conduct market research to uncover new insights on your company’s ability to attract more men and women consumers.** Through a research study on the market potential of Nigerian women, Diamond Bank discovered that it should be attracting women customers to capitalize off their exceptionally strong savings behavior. In response, Diamond Bank piloted BETA, a simple and affordable digital savings account that can be accessed near to a woman’s home and workplace. The pilot was however put on hold in recent years due to the COVID-19
• Continuously innovate your company’s products and services to better meet the changing tastes of women and men consumers. For instance, Zivame, an Indian lingerie brand, improved its customer retail experience by hiring more customer advisors and revamping the layout of its stores to be more female-friendly.

• Support women entrepreneurs who are either your customers or suppliers. Consider the various partnerships in your region and sector, such as the EY Entrepreneurial Winning Women Asia-Pacific program. This is an evergreen executive leadership program designed for women with established businesses who are ready to scale operations and grow to become global market leaders.

Suppliers

• Formally invite women and men entrepreneurs to apply to supply your company. Expand your supplier network transparently and openly. For instance, Coca-Cola encourages a diversified procurement model by inviting any supplier to register on its online database.

• Publicize and share your efforts. If your company has made commitments to increasing women suppliers, publicize your efforts. For instance, in 2015 Walmart India announced it will target doubling the number of women suppliers. It has also encouraged greater consumer uptake of products made by women by designating them as women-made products.