



Gender Equality Mainstreaming (GEM) for Business Growth

Key learnings from MEDA

The [Gender Equality Mainstreaming \(GEM\) Framework](#) is MEDA’s how-to manual – a practical guide and toolkit – for assessing gender equality, and identifying, implementing, and measuring gender equality mainstreaming strategies within companies/SMEs. The ultimate aim of the framework is to transform companies to be more gender equitable while supporting business growth and impact.

This report highlights key takeaways learned through implementation of the GEM Framework over the past several years.



FIGURE 1: GEM FRAMEWORK STEPS

The framework builds upon the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) investment standard by mainstreaming gender across a range of ESG criteria. This ensures that companies consider gender mainstreaming as a comprehensive process, and not one that is only limited to governance and human resources. Adopting an ESG lens allows a business to look at gender equality not only within its business operations and staffing, but also throughout their supply chain with suppliers and clients.

1

Upfront investment in building strong buy-in from the company being assessed is crucial.

Part of securing strong buy-in includes ensuring that there is a solid baseline understanding of gender and gender equality (GE) concepts by all levels of management and employees of the company, especially those participating in the GEM Framework process. Therefore, gender training and sensitization of these topics before implementation of GEM is vital to maximize company benefits from GEM.

In line with this, having a thorough understanding of the organization and the context before GEM implementation is very important to ensure buy-in from the company. Involving local project staff in the process also ensures that the questions asked are culturally sensitive and adapted to the local context.

2

Allotting more time to the GEM experience enriches the process.

Implementors must ensure sufficient time is allotted at each step of the GEM Framework process for best results. There needs to be enough time given to approach different staff and sectors of the business. It was found that when there was insufficient time available for each step of the process, major areas of the company were overlooked while areas that were more straightforward to analyze with a gender equality lens such as Human Resources became the major focus.

The time required to complete the six steps of the GEM Framework is highly flexible and can be modified to the needs of the user. Steps 1–5 can take approximately one year, while impact measurement should be conducted one year after completing step 5.

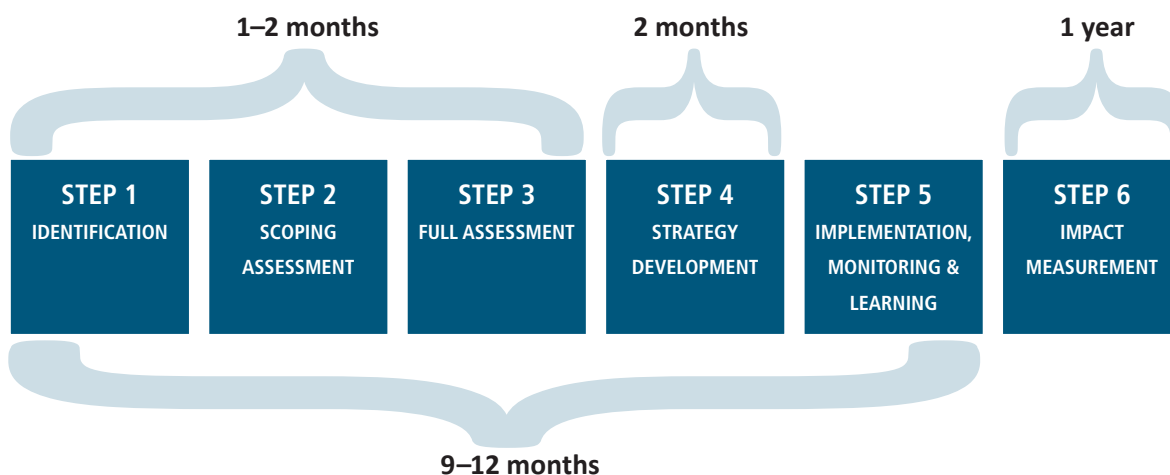


FIGURE 2: GEM ASSESSMENT TIMELINES

3

Earlier implementation is preferable.

Companies mentioned the preference of adopting the GEM Framework as early as possible in their partnership with MEDA in order to maximize the amount of time available to implement findings and recommendations alongside MEDA support. As monitoring is a lengthier step in the process, it would also be beneficial from the implementor's perspective to have sufficient time for following up on outcomes and results of the action plan developed during Step 4: Strategy Development.

4

There are potential adaptations to consider when conducting assessments.

One aspect to consider is the family-owned business angle, as the framework does not consider how family members might receive compensation outside of standard salaries for their work in a company. Adaptations to the wording of questions for cultural sensitivity purposes or to ensure comprehension by interviewees at all levels of education and gender awareness are also important to keep in mind.

5

Investment funds require specific tools.

Although the assessment overall was found to fit most SMEs, the assessment should be separately tailored for work with investment funds. A set of tools based on funds' investment cycle should be added to make the assessment a better fit for these organizations. This has been developed by MEDA and is being finalized for external dissemination.

6

Analysis of suppliers and customers were eye-opening for companies.

Questions included in the GEM Full Assessment regarding suppliers and customers proved to be very useful as a point of analysis that had not always been considered by companies previously. More focus on suppliers and customers can therefore be helpful. As an example, an ATM servicing company found an extreme gender disparity in users of their machines. Based on this information, the company was strongly recommended to conduct market research on women's usage of ATMs. The research found that it was the locations of the ATMs that were the critical factor in determining usage, as the machines were frequently located in insecure locations. Working on this disparity could open up a market opportunity and can be used as a point of differentiation from its competitors.

The assessment can also push the company to consider wider aspects such as rights, access to land, and technology. For example, women suppliers to an agribusiness were found to be negatively impacted by gender-inequitable land ownership practices, despite an improved legal framework. Becoming aware of such disparities can help a company decide whether to promote and advocate for issues such as women's ownership rights. Finally, all data accumulated should also be disaggregated by gender.

7

Incentives are important for companies' willingness to actively support and participate in the GEM Framework process.

Providing incentives is a big motivator for companies to drive them to participate in the GEM Framework. The availability of grants or other types of financial support are compelling incentives for companies to participate in the GEM Framework process and access the resources required to implement the recommendations more fully.

8

Social Inclusion and Intersectionality should be incorporated into the framework.

Expanding the framework to include more understanding of the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, geography, and gender as they apply to a given employee, supplier, customer, or other group. These concepts can aid in providing recommendations for overall gender equality and social inclusion in assessed SMEs. An example from a company that works in the medical sector is illustrative. Their assessment found that there were divisions within the company based on the origin and ethnic background of their employees, with a majority of the lowest-paid employees coming from rural areas. These employees, who constitute a critical part of the company's workforce, reported lower levels of confidence and ability to develop their career paths. Expanding the questions asked to incorporate social inclusion makes these types of inequalities visible and makes it possible for the company to work on improvements.

Looking Forward

These key takeaways from MEDA's experience with GEM for Business Growth aim to improve how MEDA works with and facilitates GEM with its private sector partners, as well as how MEDA contributes internally to improving and adapting the framework itself.