Advancing gender equality through sustainability systems

TOOLKIT AND GOOD PRACTICES

The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT is a global research-for-development organisation that is part of CGIAR. The Alliance delivers research-based solutions that harness agricultural biodiversity and sustainably transform food systems to improve people's lives.

ISEAL is a membership-based organisation that brings together ambitious sustainability systems, supporting them and their partners to tackle the world's most pressing challenges. ISEAL's work with its members includes helping them integrate gender considerations in their schemes and activities.

To learn more on the work that ISEAL and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT are doing on gender, contact:

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustainability systems (such as voluntary sustainability standard and certification schemes) are increasing their efforts to advance gender equality, recognising its importance both as a fundamental human right and as a means to achieving other aspects of sustainability.

This toolkit aims to support these systems to advance their thinking and action on gender equality by compiling curated resources and practical case studies. The toolkit is structured around three levels on which they 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.

The toolkit is organised in four sections.

1
MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN ORGANISATIONS

shares examples and resources to mainstream gender equality within the organisation.

2
INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE STANDARDS

provides resources and examples of advancing gender equality through the development and implementation of sustainability standards.

3
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY BEYOND THE STANDARDS

showcases examples of wider initiatives and programmatic strategies through which sustainability systems help to advance various aspects of gender equality.

4
GENERATING AND USING DATA ON GENDER EQUALITY

presents considerations for generating and using data on gender equality, including through effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of gender-related work.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability systems (such as voluntary sustainability standard and certification schemes) are increasing their efforts to advance gender equality on three different but overlapping levels:

Within their own organisations

Through their own standards

In their programming

Like other market-based tools and private sector entities, many sustainability systems recognise the importance of supporting gender equality, both as a fundamental human right and as a means to achieving other aspects of sustainability. While making the business case for gender equality is beyond the scope of this toolkit, 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).[1]

The International Trade Centre's (ITC) Standards Map shows that many sustainability systems across sectors are attempting to address gender considerations in their standards. Over 150 private verification/certification standards out of the 350 listed have gender-related 'policies', defined as a general principle respecting equal rights for men and women and/or policies and initiatives that respect equal opportunities on the basis of gender in the workplace and in interacting with local communities.[2] In the agriculture sector alone, 104 out of 181 standards listed report having criteria related to the theme of gender-based violence and harassment.

However, numerous challenges remain for sustainability systems seeking to support gender equality. A 2020 report found that a lack of strategic focus on gender by sustainability systems led to a failure to tackle the underlying structural causes of gender inequalities in global supply chains.[3] A more recent CGIAR-ISEAL 2022 scoping study assessing gender integration across 14 standards in the agri-food sector 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, this toolkit was developed to support sustainability systems and their partners to advance their thinking and actions around gender equality. Where possible, it highlights ongoing efforts and good practices, encouraging actors to learn from each other's experiences and build on those efforts.

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[1]   For example, see UN Women 2018.
[2]   See Annex 4 for the full list of gender-related criteria included in the ITC Standards Map.
[3]   ISEAL and BSR. 2020. Mainstreaming gender equality considerations within multistakeholder initiatives

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE TOOLKIT

The toolkit consists of curated resources and practical examples used by sustainability systems and related actors to support gender equality. It is organised to cover the following dimensions:

Section 1 - **Mainstreaming gender equality within organisations** shares examples and resources to mainstream gender equality within the organisation.

Section 2 - **Integrating gender equality in the standards** provides resources and examples of advancing gender equality through the development and implementation of sustainability standards.

Section 3 - **Promoting gender equality beyond the standards** showcases examples of wider initiatives and programmatic strategies through which sustainability systems help to advance various aspects of gender equality.

Section 4 - **Generating and using data on gender equality** presents considerations for generating and using data on gender equality, including through effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of gender-related work.

ALL FOUR SECTIONS ARE LINKED

The toolkit is divided into four sections so users can quickly access the guidance they need. It is important to emphasise that the four sections are not mutually exclusive: guidance in one often applies to other sections, and the legitimacy and effectiveness of any one dimension is contingent on supportive efforts in the others.

MAKE SURE YOU CONSIDER YOUR GENDER WORK HOLISTICALLY

Sustainability systems interested in starting or strengthening their efforts towards gender equality should develop a holistic gender action plan or gender strategy that covers several or all four dimensions. There are examples of these throughout the toolkit.

NOTES TO THE READER

■ The umbrella term '**sustainability system**' is used to refer to all standard and certification schemes, including voluntary sustainability standards and systems (VSS).

■ The guidance largely draws on illustrative examples from sustainability systems in the **agrifood sector**, although it is designed for and applicable to sustainability systems in other sectors as well.

■ This toolkit intentionally uses the term **gender 'equality'** rather than 'equity', following the preferred terminology of the United Nations. The use of 'equity' in the context of the advancement of women's rights denotes an element of interpretation of social justice, which can often be to the detriment to women. These and other key definitions can be found in Annex 1.

■ The toolkit acknowledges '**intersectionality**' as integral to gender equality. In other words, that gender relations intersect or overlap with other social and identity factors, such as age, race, ethnicity, class, religion, language, ability and more, to shape the experiences of different actors in in value chains and market systems. Advancing gender equality and empowering women *in all their diversity* requires identifying and addressing the multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination that produce inequalities between and among men and women.

Tip! Check the annexes for key definitions and concepts used throughout the toolkit, as well as the main international agreements in support of advancing gender equality in market-based approaches.

1. MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN ORGANISATIONS

Promoting gender equality at the organisational level requires sustainability systems to mainstream gender considerations throughout their institutional policies, processes and performance goals, while developing internal capacities and buy-in across the organisation to ensure sustained implementation.

Gender mainstreaming within the organisation involves:

- Developing tailored gender strategies
- Strengthening internal capacities on gender equality
- Ensuring accountability on gender equality goals.

Effective gender mainstreaming must involve more than a technical fix or one-off intervention. It requires sustained efforts to change discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and organisational practices.

HEAR IT

Podcast series: The Equality Conversation podcast series
Encompass Equality Podcast 2021-2024

Each episode showcases innovative practices for gender integration at organisational level, with practical solutions from business leaders and experts around the world on how to enable the retention of women and champion gender equality at work. The series features insights, guidance and advice on how to improve gender equality in an organisation.

1.1 DEVELOPING TAILORED GENDER STRATEGIES

Committing to gender equality at an organisational level requires embedding gender considerations into **institutional policies** and **strategic plans**. A robust gender strategy can increase the ability of sustainability systems to address gender-specific challenges within their own organisation while aligning internal gender equality objectives with those in their standards.

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.

READ IT

Tool: Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR)

European Institute for Gender Equality

This is a step-by-step guide to support gender equality work within research organisations and public bodies.

Step 2 ("analysing and assessing the status quo in an organisation") provides practical guidance on the collection and analysis of gender-related data needed to build tailored strategies.

Components considered include:

- Deciding who will carry out the analysis
- Reviewing relevant legislation and policies in your country
- Identifying existing measures promoting gender equality
- Deciding on focal indicators
- Collecting sex-disaggregated data.

DO IT

Online Assessment: Delivering Gender Equality: A Best Practices Framework for Male-Dominated Industries

Engendering Industries, USAID

This resource includes a tool to complete a **workplace gender equality assessment** and identify **best practices** to fill the gaps identified by the assessment. The tool identifies and selects best practices at each phase of the employee life cycle and can help the organisation build a tailored plan to advance gender equality.

The framework more generally outlines global best practices for advancing gender equality across corporate structures, with an emphasis on male-dominated industries.

1.1.1 Including gender in your organisational strategy

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC): 2022 Strategic Framework on Diversity and Gender

FSC's Strategic Framework on Diversity and Gender, linked to the pillars of the organisation's 2021-2026 Global Strategy, sets the goals of **mainstreaming diversity and gender within FSC by 2026.** The strategic framework presents a roadmap, supported by clear targets, to achieve diversity and gender equality within FSC:

> *"We have developed a set of diversity and gender mainstreaming goals within FSC as an organization and as a certification system to advance this work in a systematic way. Examples include: considering membership composition, integrating gender considerations in the revision of the FSC Principles & Criteria, incorporating gender-based indicators and components into audits and the Ecosystem Services Procedure, and improving the collection of sex-disaggregated data in audits. We are also committed to increasing diversity and gender equality in prioritized initiatives and partnerships, such as through value chain interventions, as well as adopting the Framework on Diversity and Gender across regional and country offices.*
>
> *To implement these goals, we are creating an Action Plan with specific targets, a focus on knowledge management for staff and members, and comprehensive communication and resource allocation strategies."*

- Sinta Dewi (Senior Manager for Diversity and Gender, FSC)

1.1.2 Making gender explicit in the theory of change

Fairtrade International: Gender in the Theory of Change

In its theory of change, Fairtrade International maps out what it does and why, providing the basis to measure the results of their work and progress towards their goals. Fairtrade International has included gender in its theory of change and illustrates how its specific interventions in gender-related work area can have a long-lasting impact.

Fairtrade International has also developed an interactive version of its theory of change, for users to explore the pathways between its model and activities and its impact for farmers and workers.

Explore Fairtrade International's Theory of Change at:
https://toc.fairtrade.net/

1.2 STRENGTHENING INTERNAL CAPACITIES ON GENDER EQUALITY

Building internal capacity and buy-in is crucial for organisations seeking to achieve a more **equitable workplace environment** that ultimately supports gender equality outcomes. Increased knowledge about gender issues more broadly across organisations is a key success factor for enhancing gender equality.[4]

Well-informed employees can contribute to a culture of inclusivity and accountability and drive meaningful cultural and structural change within the organisation. Including employees in a **collaborative process for planning and implementing the strategy** can foster a sense of ownership and collective responsibility and sustain changes.

A key strategy is **hiring a dedicated gender advisor** with well-defined terms of reference. The UN Women Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming offers practical guidance for strengthening the catalytic role that gender equality specialists can have as internal change agents for gender mainstreaming.[5] This requires:

- Having the necessary status and opportunities to fulfil their roles
- Being well-integrated in the organisation, **supported** at all organisational levels, and explicitly **by management**
- Being able to **access organisational processes, data and financial resources** to achieve meaningful impact.

The strategic support they provide can enhance the effectiveness of gender initiatives and strategies through the provision of expertise, training for employees, and support on internal policies and practices.

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[4] See Success factors for gender equality plan development and implementation in European Institute for Gender Equality. 2024. Gender Equality in Academia and Research – GEAR tool.

[5] See chapter 5 in UN Women. 2022. Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming.

UNECE Declaration of Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) launched the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative in 2016 to provide a practical way forward for standards bodies wishing to take a step towards gender equality through the standards they develop and their standards development process.

UNECE encourages standard development organisations to sign a Declaration on Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development. It includes a list of potential actions that standards development organisations can include in their gender action plans.

The actions correspond to the following areas:

- Working towards gender-balanced/representative and inclusive standards development environments
- Creating gender-responsive standards
- Creating gender-responsive standards bodies.

The latter includes actions to assess gender-related skills and expertise and provide gender awareness training to employees.

For the full list of suggested actions, see Annex 3.

HEAR IT

Podcast: #BalanceforBetter – the right approach to D&I in the workplace

Hays Recruitment, 2019

"To move towards more integrated diversity, the company needs to internalise diversity as part of a culture. It needs to become a value, something that is a given and core to the way we do things around here. It's when the value of diversity is no longer debated but presumed and there's a genuine commitment to real merits. So, continuing to break down barriers, understanding what they are, and both financial and the non-financial benefits start to be experienced.

Targets are very good, but they need to be owned by the executive, so diversity becomes embedded in culture programs and products, and then it also can be fostered beyond the organisational boundaries. This may involve holding your supply chain accountable as well."

— Ruth Sealy, Associate Professor of Organisation Studies, Director of Impact, University of Exeter

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HEAR IT

Podcast: Diversity and Inclusion at Mars Petcare: Translating Awareness into Action

Cold Call Podcast, Harvard Business School, 2023

In this podcast, hear from Erica Coletta, Mars Petcare's Chief People Officer, and Ibtehal Fathy, Global Inclusion and Diversity Officer at Mars Inc., who discuss their leadership in building inclusion and diversity at Mars Petcare.

The podcast features Katie Coffman, Associate Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School, who shares insights from using experimental methods to study individual team and managerial decision-making with a focus on the role of gender stereotypes and shaping beliefs.

1.3 ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY ON GENDER EQUALITY GOALS

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.[6]

Good practices around ensuring accountability on gender equality goals include:

- Establishing clear roles and responsibilities for employees involved in implementation
- Setting specific performance indicators related to expected gender outcomes
- Reporting publicly on gender-disaggregated data, and sharing gender, diversity and inclusion metrics
- Sharing successes and lessons learned and engaging in dialogues with other stakeholders about gender equality efforts (e.g., through sector associations or alliances, or at ISEAL events)
- Regularly reviewing and updating the gender strategy or action plan based on feedback, learning and evolving best practices.

Accountability is strengthened when accompanied by clear **measures of enforcement**, which may include:

- **Leadership accountability**: For management to work with a broad base of employees, defining their specific gender equality responsibilities, and integrating them into performance evaluations and incentives.[7]
- **Training and capacity building**: Regular training programmes for all employees, particularly at mid-and senior management level, to raise awareness of gender issues, share metrics and indicators from gender assessments, and tackle structural barriers such as unconscious gender bias.[8]
- **Leveraging policies and guidelines**: Developing and disseminating clear policies outlining expectations related to gender equality (e.g., anti-discrimination policies and recruitment practices) can reduce risks of gender-based discrimination within the organisation and increase staff commitment to the organisation's gender strategy.
- **Creating support systems**: Regardless of the size of operations, sustainability systems can benefit from establishing or participating in networks (e.g., internal to the organisation, like mentorship programmes; or sectoral alliances) to support women and other groups within the organisation who face structural barriers to certain aspects or career advancement.
- **Responsive feedback mechanisms**: Creating 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 affected groups.

Gender mainstreaming can take time, and sustainability systems should abide by continuous improvement principles, reviewing their efforts and goals over time as they continue to build their internal capacity on gender equality.

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[6] Examples of accountability framework reports include UN Women. 2020. Accountability Framework for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.
[7] Robotham, K., Jackson, D., & Van Bommel, T. 2024. Six actions to create genuine DEI policies; Travis, D. J., Shaffer, E., & Thorpe-Moscon, J. 2019. Getting Real About Inclusive Leadership: Why Change Starts With You.
[8] UN Women. 2022. Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming.

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY

Better Cotton: Gender equality as a cross-cutting priority

In 2019, Better Cotton launched its first gender strategy, outlining its objectives and action plan to mainstream a gender-sensitive approach across its operations. The strategy includes workstreams on incorporating gender at the sustainable cotton community, farm, and organisational level.

This commitment is reflected in Better Cotton's 2030 strategy, which identifies women's empowerment as one of its five impact areas, defining objectives and commitments at three levels: Sustainable Cotton Community, Farm, and Organisation. "Gender considerations were integrated during the development of the 2030 vision and strategy," says Emma Dennis. "As a result, gender equality is a priority and cross-cutting theme."[9]

Since then, Better Cotton has launched its revised Principles and Criteria, in which gender equality is a cross-cutting principle and has its own criteria to ensure it is not addressed as a standalone element, but rather, seen as an inherent factor to progress across all Principles and Indicators.

[9] Better Cotton blog: Why We Made Gender Equality a Cross-cutting Priority in Our Latest Principles and Criteria Revision.
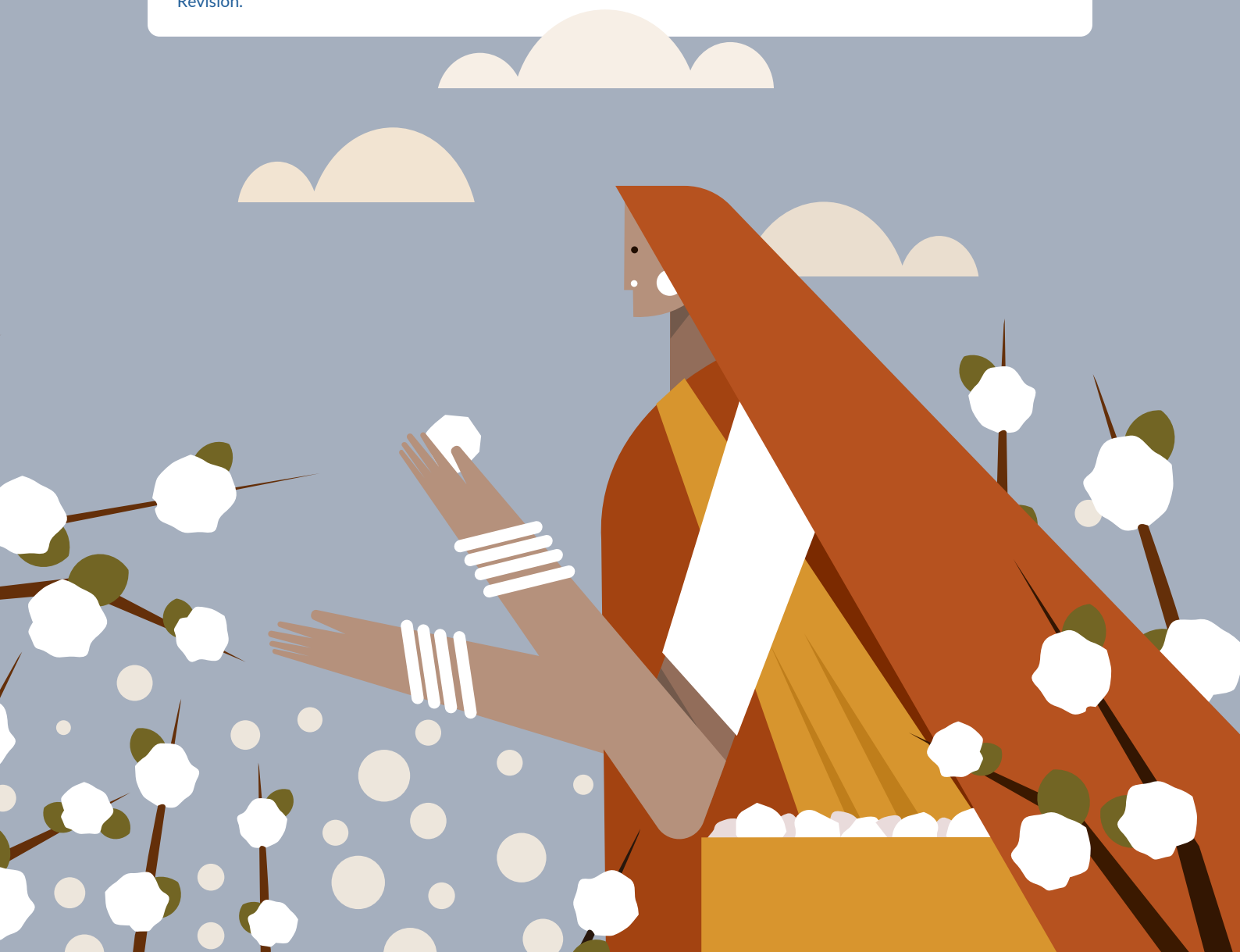
2. INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE STANDARDS

A CGIAR-ISEAL 2022 scoping study on the state of gender integration among ISEAL Community Members highlighted three interconnected steps to approaching gender equality in sustainability systems:

- Minimum prevention of harm *within* standards
- Proactively supporting gender equality *within* standards
- Promoting gender equality and women's rights *beyond* the standard.

This section focuses on the broad range of measures available to support gender equality *within* voluntary standards and certification systems. It should be read alongside section 3, which provides guidance on accompanying or complementary measures beyond the standard that can enhance these efforts.

CGIAR-ISEAL SCOPING STUDY

State of gender integration among ISEAL Community Members in the agri-food sector

Minimum prevention of harm *within* standards	Proactively supporting gender equality *within* standards	Promoting gender equality and women's rights *beyond* the standard
Anti-discrimination and equality of treatment	Policy/strategy requirements for members and producer organisations	Strengthening women's capacities and leadership
Zero tolerance for harassment or violence	Representation (from ground-level committees through to organisational governance and internal processes)	Addressing women's unpaid care work
Accountability requirements	Enabling environments and systemic change.	Preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls
Gender-specific fair working conditions.		

2.1 GETTING STARTED: GENDER-RESPONSIVE STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Before identifying and deciding gender-responsive measures in standards, it is critical to consider the standards development process itself.

The UNECE Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development (introduced in Section 1) lists several areas for organisations to commit to, in order to make their standards development process gender responsive:

- Strive for a representative number of women in all phases of standards development.
- Strive to create a standards development environment which enables gender inclusivity and equality.
- Support individuals who want to be gender advocates by encouraging and enabling them to act within their areas of standards development.
- Strive for gender representative participation in other phases of the standards development process including making proposals, commenting on proposals and commenting on drafts.
- Strive to develop a network of gender experts to provide a resource to support standards development committees in their work.
- Ensure committees have relevant expertise, tools and resources to strive to develop gender-responsive standards.
- Strive to institutionalise successful and effective practices, procedures and policies to ensure the future/sustainability of gender-responsive standards development.

Specific actions for each of these areas are listed in Annex 3.

The UNECE Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards also provides suggestions for how to increase the representation of women on technical committees and ensure that the standards development process and meetings are inclusive to improve the quality and gender-responsiveness of standards.

However, the guidelines are clear that increasing women's representation does not mean there is gender expertise. Regardless of the number of women on a standards development committee, and independent of the committee's potential blind spots or biases, committees should take steps to ensure that they are producing gender-responsive standards:

- Start with the assumption that gender differences are relevant to the content of the standard.
- Gather evidence to quantify and elucidate the impact of those gender differences for the standard.
- Take targeted action to mitigate the impact of gender differences on the standard.

Key resources
- ISEAL's Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems
- UNECE Gender Responsive Standards Initiative

2.2 SETTING GENDER-RESPONSIVE SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS AND REQUIREMENTS

ISEAL and the CGIAR Gender Equality Initiative partnered to collate good practices in setting gender-responsive standards and requirements. The resulting Guidance Note provides a collection of good practices to support sustainability systems to get started on **integrating gender equality in their standards**. The resources below provide insights and experiences from a few select standards on their journeys of integrating gender into standards.

2.2.1 Minimum standards to prevent harm

At the bare minimum, sustainability standards should have basic requirements or criteria to **protect women from harm, including the prevention of harassment and equal treatment under the law.**

Minimum prevention of harm *within* standards	Proactively supporting gender equality *within* standards	Promoting gender equality and women's rights *beyond* the standard
Anti-discrimination and equality of treatment	Policy/strategy requirements for members and producer organisations	Strengthening women's capacities and leadership
Zero tolerance for harassment or violence	Representation (from ground-level committees through to organisational governance and internal processes)	Addressing women's unpaid care work
Accountability requirements	Enabling environments and systemic change.	Preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls
Gender-specific fair working conditions.		

DO NO HARM (IN THE STANDARD)

1 Anti-discrimination and equality of treatment

2 Zero tolerance for harassment or violence

3 Accountability requirements

4 Gender-specific fair working conditions.

Examples of 'do no harm' criteria from ISEAL Community Members' standards

Anti-discrimination and equality of treatment

- Specifying that workers are not subject to discrimination in recruitment, promotion, access to training, remuneration, allocation of work, termination of employment, retirement or other activities (*Fairtrade USA Agricultural Production Standard*).

- Ensuring the non-discrimination policy is communicated to farmers/workers/employees (*Better Cotton Principles and Criteria*).

- Having a non-discrimination and equal opportunity clause, with possible exceptions for diversity targets (*IRMA Standard for Responsible Mining*).

- Requiring specific outreach to women farmers and workers to be conducted by women facilitators (*Better Cotton Principles and Criteria*).

Zero tolerance for harassment or violence

- Having a clause stating no tolerance of gender-based violence (*Fairtrade International Standard for Small-scale Producer Organisations*)

- Including a procedure for cases of sexual harassment in grievance procedures, with a designated woman or women's committee directly linked to senior management (*Fairtrade Standard for Hired Labour*).

- Requiring operators to ensure workers do not suffer from abuse, harassment and/or violence – this could include having a publicly available and communicated policy/procedures/protocols/internal regulations to prevent sexual and other forms of abuse, harassment and/or violence (*Bonsucro Production Standard*).

- Recommending actions to combat harassment or abuse against women, such as farmer groups imposing sanctions on members that physically or emotionally abuse their spouses or ensuring that a woman directly receives money from the sales of product produced on her land (*Fairtrade USA Agricultural Production Standard*).

Accountability requirements

- Workforce analysis for each site which includes information about gender (*Fairtrade USA Agricultural Production Standard*).

- Collecting sex-disaggregated data (*Better Cotton Principles and Criteria*).

- Due diligence on human rights risks and impacts including consultation with vulnerable groups including women, who must be meaningfully engaged during the assessment process (*Fairtrade USA Agricultural Production Standard*).

- Mitigation strategies designed to address risks to be developed with consideration of women's needs (*IRMA Standard for Responsible Mining*).

Gender-specific fair working conditions

- Including special accommodations for pregnant and nursing women, e.g., a separate space to breastfeed (*IRMA Mining Standard*) and breastfeeding breaks (*Rainforest Alliance 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard: Farm Requirements*).

- Setting maternity leave according to national laws or collective bargaining agreement regulations (*Fairtrade Standard for Small-scale Producer Organisations*).

- Separate accommodation and separate sanitation facilities for men and women in the case of 10 or more workers (*Rainforest Alliance 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard: Farm Requirements*).

- Prohibiting pregnant and nursing women from participating in hazardous work (*Fairtrade International, Hired Labour and Small Producers Standards, and Rainforest Alliance 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard: Farm Requirements*).

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY
Gold Standard: Gender Policy
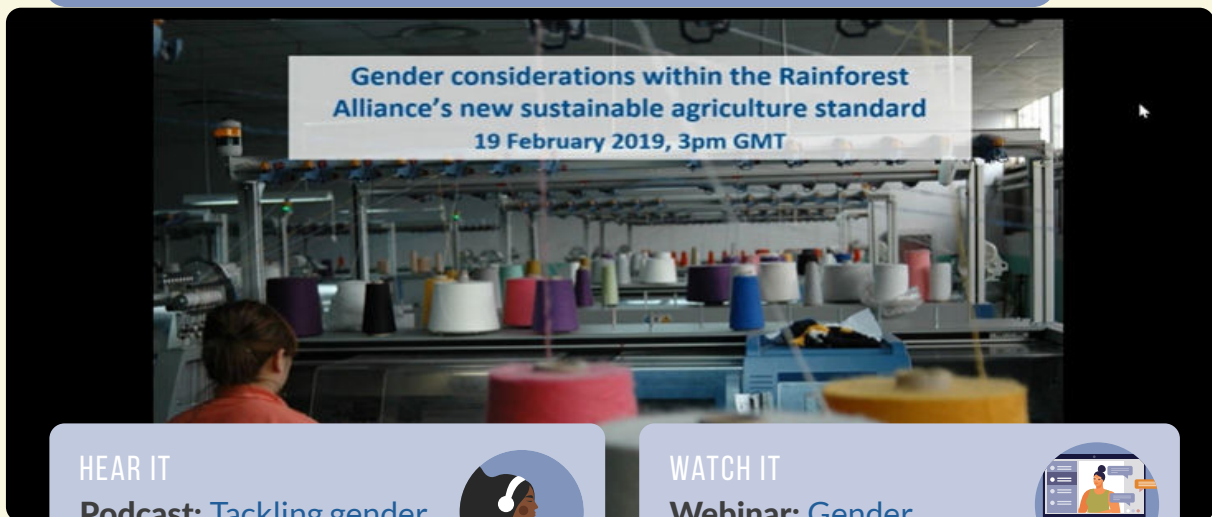
Gold Standard for the Global Goals

GOVERNANCE

The Gender Policy of the Gold Standard commits to enhancing and promoting the goals of gender equality, social inclusion and women's empowerment within the Secretariat, throughout Gold Standard certifications procedures and as an integrated measure of the social dividends of Gold Standard certified projects. See also Gold Standard's Gender Equality and Requirements Guidelines.

The Gold Standard has put in place a 'gender ecosystem' that integrates gender and social inclusion vertically and horizontally across diverse stakeholders and through the course of the life cycle of certified projects.

That 'ecosystem' includes a policy that clearly delineates the 'foundational' or mandatory minimum gender-sensitive criteria that all projects need to fulfil, and more targeted or 'proactive' gender-responsive certification seeking to intentionally and innovatively increase women's empowerment, agency and opportunities.

- To be eligible for Gold Standard certification, all applicants must satisfy the minimum criteria to prove the gender sensitivity of their project design and implementation. This includes compliance with the gender 'do no harm' safeguard, gender-gap analysis and gender-sensitive stakeholder consultations. This is referred to as foundational gender-sensitive certification.
- To be eligible for targeted gender-responsive Gold Standard certification, applicants will be required to 1) have established policies, strategies or action plans that promote gender equality, and 2) comply with project guidelines and procedures established by Gold Standard. This is referred to as a proactive gender-responsive approach.

SPOTLIGHT ON DEVELOPING A GENDER-RESPONSIVE CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME:

Gender considerations within the Rainforest Alliance's new sustainable agriculture standard
19 February 2019, 3pm GMT

HEAR IT

Podcast: Tackling gender inequalities: how to get started in your scheme

ISEAL , 2024

In this podcast, we hear from Chloe Austin from the Responsible Jewellery Council about how they have incorporated gender into their scheme to understand how they got started and what lessons and advice they have for other sustainability systems looking to do the same.

WATCH IT

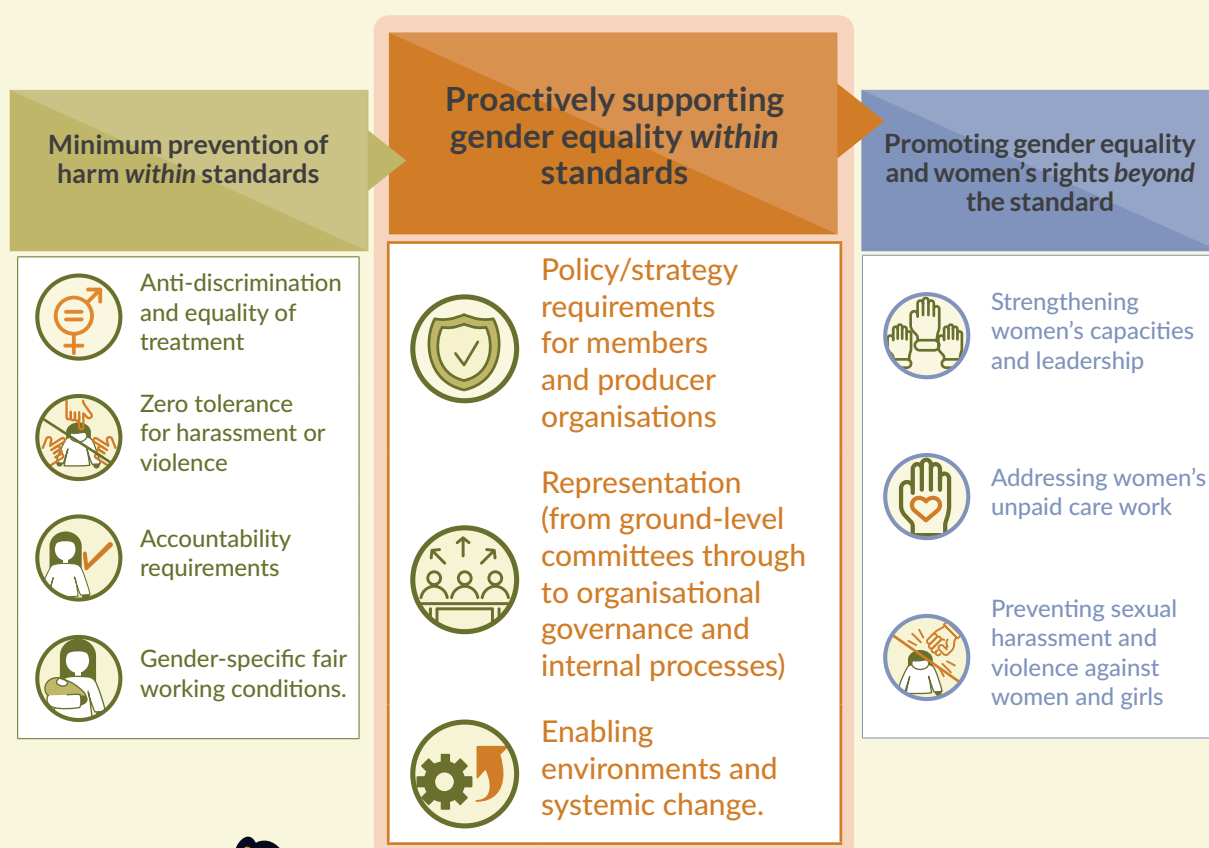**Webinar:** Gender considerations within RA's new standard

ISEAL, 2019

This webinar explores Rainforest Alliance's experience in developing a new certification programme that represented a significant shift in its approach to gender. It includes a discussion of the implications, opportunities and challenges of this new approach.

2.2.2 Proactively promoting gender equality through standards

Sustainability systems should strive to go beyond only minimising risks to women, to more proactively support gender equality and women's rights through establishing certification requirements or standards that address more challenging issues.

Good practice examples from ISEAL Community Members are grouped into three categories:

1 Policy/strategy requirements for members and producer organisations

2 Representation (from ground-level committees through to organisational governance and internal processes)

3 Enabling environments and systemic change.

Minimum prevention of harm *within* standards

Proactively supporting gender equality *within* standards

Promoting gender equality and women's rights *beyond* the standard

Anti-discrimination and equality of treatment

Zero tolerance for harassment or violence

Accountability requirements

Gender-specific fair working conditions.

Policy/strategy requirements for members and producer organisations

Representation (from ground-level committees through to organisational governance and internal processes)

Enabling environments and systemic change.

Strengthening women's capacities and leadership

Addressing women's unpaid care work

Preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls

Policy/strategy requirements for members and producer organisations

A significant step that standards can take to proactively support gender equality is to require their members to have their own gender policies and strategies in place. For example, Fairtrade International requires small-scale producer organisations to develop and implement a gender policy, ensure members are aware of this policy and its contents, and involve women in the development and implementation of the policy.

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY

Fairtrade International: Setting gender requirements for certified entities

Fairtrade Standard for Small-scale Producer Organisations requires its members to develop a gender policy. The gender policy should:

- Promote the participation of women in boards, leadership positions and other structures within the organisation
- Contain measures against sexual harassment
- Stipulate the establishment of a grievance mechanism
- Collect and use gender-disaggregated data
- Invest in projects and programmes focusing on women's needs.

Representation

Standards can support gender equality by requiring women's improved representation at various levels, or establishing quotas. At the ground level, this can include ensuring that committees include representation of diverse groups, that grievance committees are gender-sensitive and that there is a specific gender committee. At an organisational level, gender equality can be promoted through employment practices.

'Ground-level' representation

- Promoting consultation and information exchange between and among employers and workers' organisations through social dialogue in the form of mixed committees, gender committees, committees to address harassment etc. (Bonsucro Production Standard 2.4.2).
- Including a gender-sensitive grievance committee within grievance mechanisms (Rainforest Alliance 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard: Farm Requirements 1.5.1).
- Appointing a committee responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of measures that promote gender equality and women's empowerment that includes at least one woman and one person from management (Rainforest Alliance 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard: Farm Requirements).
- Ensuring committees reflect the composition of the membership, including in terms of gender. Such committees include producer executive bodies (Fairtrade Standard for Hired Labour A4.2.3) and committees deciding on the use of premium payments and community investments (Fairtrade USA Agricultural Production Standard 1.1.2a).
- Including gender in community needs assessments and evaluations, covering topics such as gender equity, participation by women in income-generating activities and farm decision-making, and other women's empowerment issues (Fairtrade USA Agricultural Production Standard 1.2.1a).

'Organisational-level' representation

- Promoting gender equality in employment practices, training opportunities, awarding of contracts, processes of engagement and management activities (FSC Principles and Criteria V5 2.2).
- Promoting women's inclusion in management and skilled positions, with recruitment operations increasing women's presence in management and skilled positions to not less than 15%. Women should also be included in leadership and decision-making bodies (Bonsucro Production Standard 5.4.1).
- Requiring companies to undertake activities to achieve equity in the workplace. This includes specifically addressing the employment and promotion of suitably qualified people from disadvantaged and minority groups (Fairtrade Standard for Hired Labour 2.2.7).

Enabling environment and systemic change

Sustainability systems can also support gender equality and women's empowerment by including requirements within their standards that **address the enabling environment** and seek to change systems. Activities might include 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.

Examples of how this can be incorporated into standards include:

- Requiring companies to give special attention to the empowerment of women by means of adequate training, capacity building, guidance, encouragement and assistance as necessary (*Fairtrade Standard for Hired Labour 2.2.6*).
- Requiring companies to provide support for crèche facilities for their workers' children either inside or outside the premises (*Fairtrade Standard for Hired Labour 2.2.10*).
- 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 (*Responsible Jewellery Council Code of Practice: Standard 2019 18.2*).
- Putting in place a documented training programme that takes into account gender-specific needs (*RSPO Principles and Criteria 2018 3.7.1 (C)*).
- Conducting community-based women's empowerment training, covering topics such as developing business skills, vocational trainings and life skills, legal rights and civic education (*Bonsucro Production Standard 5.4.1*).

2.3 AUDITING FOR GENDER-RELEVANT ISSUES

Whether or not sustainability systems proactively define gender-related criteria in their standards, their respective assurance systems can help identify and mitigate gender-related risks affecting rightsholders within supply chains.

Audits themselves, though, must be gender sensitive. Research has shown that in general audits have not been able to pick up on critical gender issues, including systemic discrimination and sexual harassment.[10] Sustainability systems actors identified challenges with training auditors to ask the right probing questions

and create safe spaces to be able to detect discrimination, and with addressing the gender biases of auditors themselves.[11]

A gender-sensitive assurance approach can help to identify and track gender-specific risks in supply chains. Incorporating specific indicators related to gender equality – such as those related to wages, access to training, and representation in decision-making roles – can highlight the areas where gender-related risks are most pronounced and where mitigation strategies are needed.

READ MORE

Gender Equality in Social Auditing Guidance
BSR, 2018

BSR has developed guidance resources for business and stakeholders conducting gender-sensitive due diligence. Tools include gender-sensitive supplier codes of conduct and a guide to gender-sensitive social auditing, outlining how gender considerations should be integrated into social auditing methodologies and processes. In 2019, it published A framework for conducting gender-responsive due diligence in supply chains.

Notable actions and opportunities highlighted in the guidance to **mainstream gender considerations within social audits** include (1) applying a gender lens on due diligence, (2) raising suppliers' awareness on the importance of gender equality, and (3) calling for better gender-disaggregated data collection and more transparency.

Gender Equality in
Social Auditing Guidance
Funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

BSR

10 Smith, S., Busiello, F., Taylor, G. and Jones, E. 2019. Voluntary Sustainability Standards and Gender Equality in Global Value Chains. International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development.
11 Morgan, M. 2022. State of gender integration among ISEAL Community Members in the agri-food sector (scoping study).

3. PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY BEYOND THE STANDARDS

Summaries of existing evidence suggest that sustainability systems have had minimal impact on redressing gender inequalities.[12] Even when sustainability systems have made concerted efforts to address gender and other social inequalities through standard-setting, progress has been slow or barely visible. 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.

Figure 1 provides a good visual synthesis of the root causes underlying gender inequality in agriculture specifically. Making substantive headway requires addressing the structural barriers to gender equality, which must go beyond only standards.
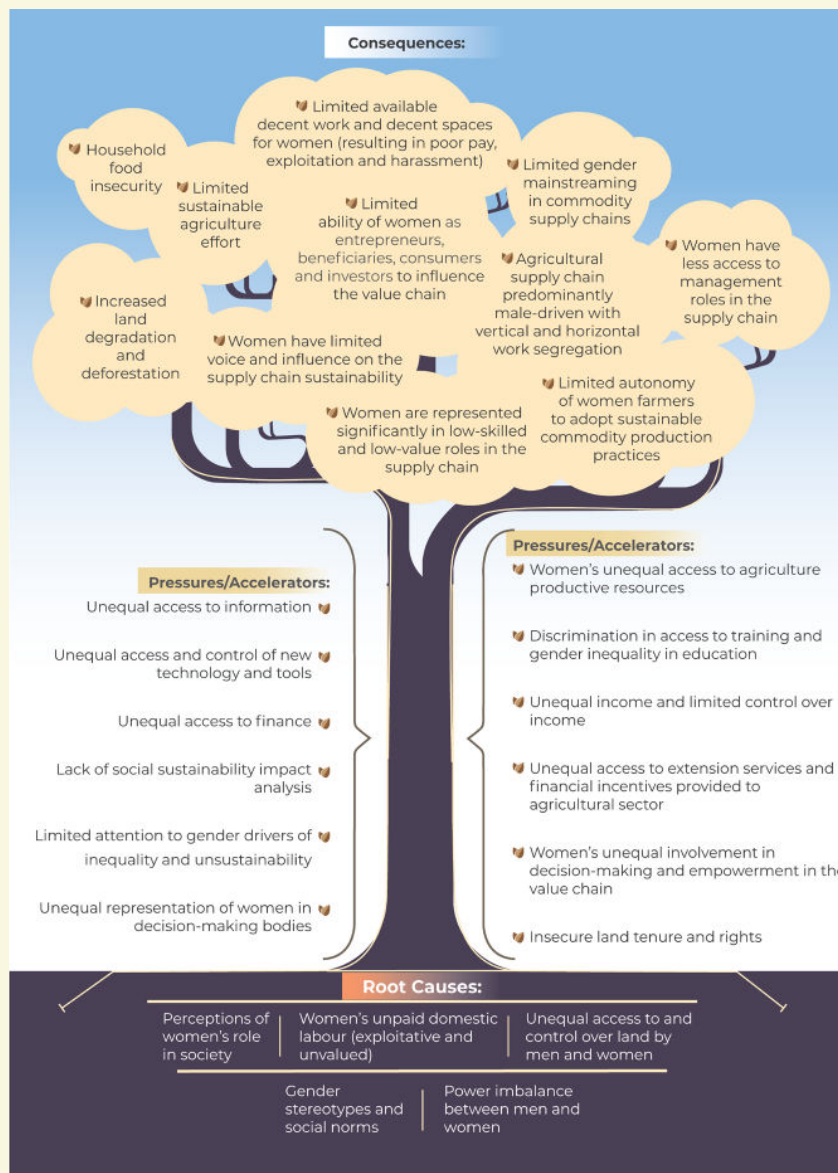

Consequences:

- Limited available decent work and decent spaces for women (resulting in poor pay, exploitation and harassment)
- Household food insecurity
- Limited sustainable agriculture effort
- Limited ability of women as entrepreneurs, beneficiaries, consumers and investors to influence the value chain
- Limited gender mainstreaming in commodity supply chains
- Agricultural supply chain predominantly male-driven with vertical and horizontal work segregation
- Women have less access to management roles in the supply chain
- Increased land degradation and deforestation
- Women have limited voice and influence on the supply chain sustainability
- Women are represented significantly in low-skilled and low-value roles in the supply chain
- Limited autonomy of women farmers to adopt sustainable commodity production practices

Pressures/Accelerators:

- Unequal access to information
- Unequal access and control of new technology and tools
- Unequal access to finance
- Lack of social sustainability impact analysis
- Limited attention to gender drivers of inequality and unsustainability
- Unequal representation of women in decision-making bodies

Pressures/Accelerators:

- Women's unequal access to agriculture productive resources
- Discrimination in access to training and gender inequality in education
- Unequal income and limited control over income
- Unequal access to extension services and financial incentives provided to agricultural sector
- Women's unequal involvement in decision-making and empowerment in the value chain
- Insecure land tenure and rights

Root Causes:

- Perceptions of women's role in society
- Women's unpaid domestic labour (exploitative and unvalued)
- Unequal access to and control over land by men and women
- Gender stereotypes and social norms
- Power imbalance between men and women

Figure 1 Problem tree on gender and agriculture[13]

[12] More details on these summaries of existing evidence can be found in Morgan, M. and Zaremba, H. 2023. The contribution of voluntary sustainability systems to women's participation and leadership in decision-making: A strategic evidence review.

[13] This graphic and accompanying description can be found in the report Gender mainstreaming in global agricultural supply chains can accelerate good growth: What works and for whom?
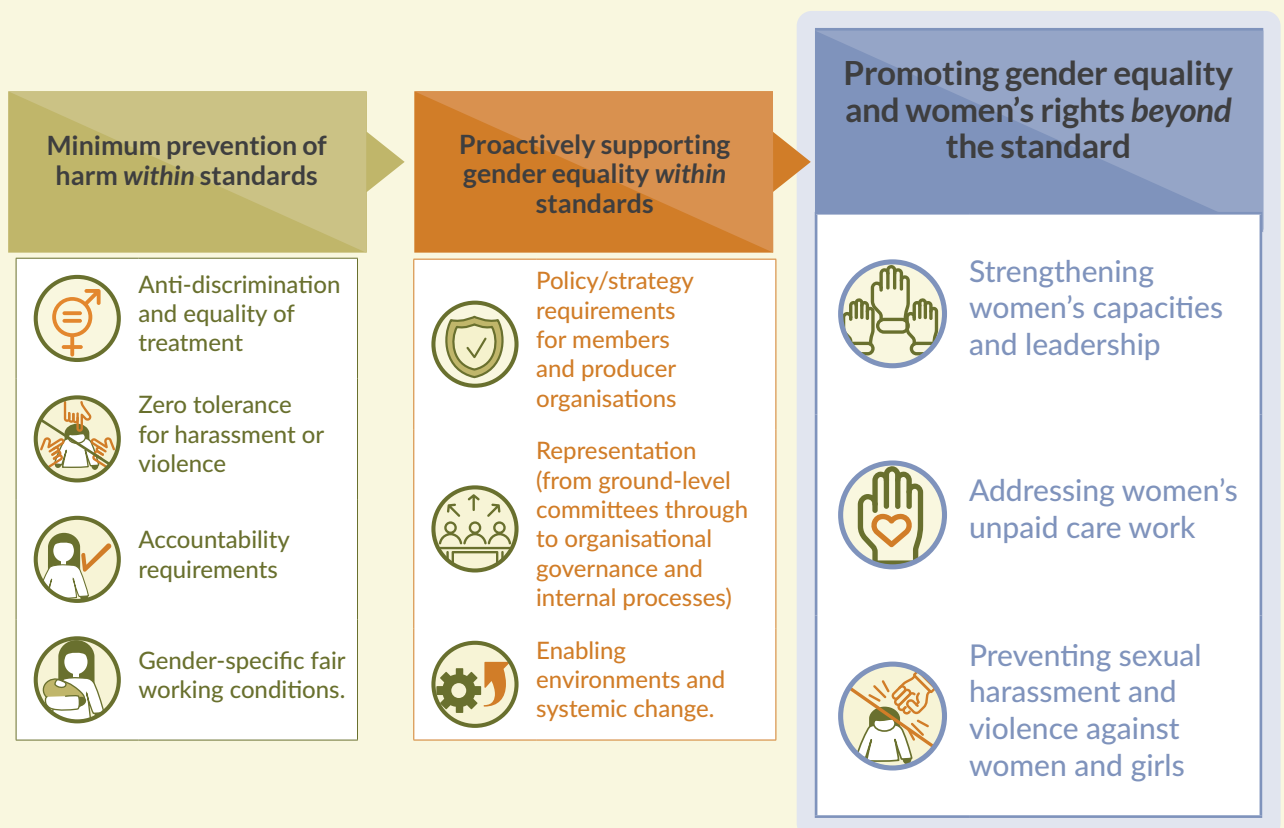
Section 2 of this toolkit focused on integrating gender equality considerations in standards. While increasing the gender-responsiveness of standards is an obvious and important avenue for sustainability systems to take action, standards *alone* cannot redress these deep-rooted gender inequalities. And standards *doing it alone* are much less effective than those working in partnership with other organisations committed to gender equality.

Section 3 considers a wide variety of **initiatives and programming beyond standards** to complement sustainability systems' efforts to support gender equality through their standards. It provides three examples of programmatic **interventions that tackle different dimensions of (in)equality** in the lives of value chain actors:

1 Strengthening women's capacities and leadership

2 Addressing women's unpaid care work

3 Preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls

The section also considers **two ways sustainability systems can support this change**, by:

■ Advocating for structural change   ■ Working in partnership.

Minimum prevention of harm *within* standards

- Anti-discrimination and equality of treatment
- Zero tolerance for harassment or violence
- Accountability requirements
- Gender-specific fair working conditions.

Proactively supporting gender equality *within* standards

- Policy/strategy requirements for members and producer organisations
- Representation (from ground-level committees through to organisational governance and internal processes)
- Enabling environments and systemic change.

Promoting gender equality and women's rights *beyond* the standard

- Strengthening women's capacities and leadership
- Addressing women's unpaid care work
- Preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls

3.1 PROGRAMMES TACKLING DIMENSIONS OF (IN)EQUALITY

The section below highlights three areas where sustainability systems programmes can tackle gender inequalities, namely: programmatic work strengthening **women's capacities and leadership**; programmatic work focused on **addressing women's unpaid care work**; and efforts undertaken to **prevent sexual harassment and violence** against women and girls.

3.1.1 Strengthening women's capacities and leadership

As noted in Section 2, sustainability systems may use criteria or requirements in a standard to strengthen capacities. This includes actions such as providing access to training programmes specifically for women workers or increasing access to finance and support services for women entrepreneurs. More examples can be found in Annex 4.

Sustainability systems can also decide to support initiatives or pilot projects that provide more targeted skills training or financing for women producers and entrepreneurs beyond what is specified in their standard. This is recommended, given that research finds that women are often side-lined in capacity-building interventions.[14]

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY

Fairtrade: Women's coffee cooperatives

Angelique's Finest is a Fairtrade certified coffee grown and processed entirely by women. The coffee is grown by 2,852 female farmers, who are members of six cooperatives. By taking charge of the production and processing, the women reap the proceeds of their work, earning 55% more per kilogram of coffee sold than if they sold the beans as green coffee.

READ MORE

Entry Points and Good Practices for gender-sensitive interventions to close the Living Income Gap
The Initiative for Sustainable Agricultural Supply Chains, 2024

This strategy document highlights entry points and good practices for gender-sensitive interventions to reduce the living income gap for smallholder farmers.

See tips and tools and download the strategy paper.

Studies on sustainability systems and gender equality tend to focus only on women's economic

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14   Smith et al. 2019. Voluntary Sustainability Standards and Gender Equality in Global Value Chains.

empowerment and market-based interventions, often with the implicit assumption that economic gains will spill over to other aspects of women's empowerment and increase gender equality. Yet the quick wins commonly associated with primarily focusing on increasing women's economic assets and resources tend to result in narrow outcomes with limited reach.[15]

Studies on sustainability systems should consider identifying and targeting other aspects of women's empowerment simultaneously to support better and more lasting outcomes. This may be **programming to increase women's agency and decision-making power at different scales.** Fairtrade's Women's Schools of Leadership are 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[16].

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY
Fairtrade: Women's Schools of Leadership

Fairtrade International has been strengthening the capacity of women and men members of producer organizations to better address gender issues in their organizations and communities through Women's Schools of Leadership. The goal is to **increase the representation of skilled women in leadership roles** in order to influence decision-making and support more equitable participation. One study found that Leadership Schools have been instrumental in strengthening the participation of some women within their producer organizations, though broader participation of women in local governance beyond that is still low.

The Schools' curricula and modules have been adopted and adapted to the needs of different regions. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the Women's Schools of Leadership consists of a 9-month training, mentoring and coaching programme aimed at improving participants' basic leadership skills and application of human rights to their contexts. Since 2017, the programme has helped to build the capacity of women and men in a number of areas, covering topics like personal development, gender awareness (including masculinities), leadership skills, strategic negotiation, project and financial management, entrepreneurship, and so on. Thanks to external funding, a total of 144 women and men from 14 Fairtrade certified cocoa cooperatives will complete training by 2025.

Each graduate is responsible for relaying the knowledge and practices they gain from the training to the thousands of women in their respective communities. Previous graduates have found success and lessons learned through income generation projects. For example, two school canteens (feeding more than 100 children) have been set up using the food crops grown by a women's association. Furthermore, cooperatives have invested in 14 women's groups who support the livelihoods of women farmers.

[15]   More details are available in Morgan and Zaremba (2023) and UNCTAD (2022).

[16]   Gallagher et al. 2020. Women's access, equity and empowerment: Progress and uptake of the Fairtrade gender strategy. Center for International Forestry Research

Efforts to build and strengthen capacities need to target women, but also include others to provide the enabling environment for women to exercise those capacities. For example gender awareness training for spouses or couples together has been shown to contribute to a higher proportion of women's or joint decision-making over household revenues.[17] Sustainability systems should also **provide training and guidance to members and staff** so they can comply with requirements.

For example, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) produced thorough guidance to assist its members to adopt best practices for gender balance in their operations and to meet gender-specific criteria and indicators. The goal was to assist companies to take the necessary steps to close gender gaps by expanding women's economic opportunities and increasing awareness and education among the workforce.[18]

3.1.2 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.[19]

Rural women in particular tend to live in contexts where household work and responsibilities are especially labour-intensive due to challenging energy, water and care arrangements. 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.[20] 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 well-being.

Sustainability systems seeking to address these barriers can include criteria to provide childcare or ensure that women workers have access to training programmes that work around their care responsibilities (more ideas in Section 2.3 and Annex 4). Beyond the standard, they can also **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. For example, the Fairtrade Foundation supported investment in a communal corn processing mill and a village electrification project to facilitate women's work in maize processing.[21]

DO IT   *Key reference*

Toolkit: Rapid Care Analysis Toolkit
Oxfam, 2024

The Rapid Care Analysis Toolkit 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.

In addition to providing the tools, it includes information on why businesses should address the issue of unpaid care and domestic work, what benefits this can yield and how to achieve this.

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[17] See more in Morgan and Zaremba (2023).
[18] RSPO. 2021. Practical Guidance on Gender Inclusion and Compliance to the 2018 RSPO Principles and Criteria (P&C) and the 2019 Independent Smallholder (ISH) Standard
[19] International Labour Organization. 2018. Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work.
[20] UN Women. 2018. Why gender equality matters across all SDGs.
[21] Fairtrade Foundation. 2015. Equal harvest: Removing the barriers to women's participation in smallholder agriculture.

3.1.3 Preventing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls

Section 2 and Annex 4 provide examples of how sustainability systems are addressing sexual harassment and violence against women and girls in their standards. Beyond the standard, some sustainability systems are explicitly tackling sexual harassment and violence against women and girls in their programming. UN Women's Global Women's Safety Framework in Rural Spaces[22] 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.

The tool also provides resources and good practices to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence.

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.[23]

READ MORE

Women's Safety Accelerator Fund

Multi-stakeholder effort, managed by IDH

The Women's Safety Accelerator Fund (WSAF) 2.0 builds on a first phase of efforts to address gender-based violence to improve the safety and empowerment of women and youth in India's tea sector. Whereas the first phase focused on awareness-raising, the second phase focuses on practical solutions to gender-based violence, such as establishing strong redress mechanisms in tea estates and creating enabling conditions for the empowerment of women and youth. The WSAF seeks to engage 550 tea estates in this endeavour.

Lessons from the first phase include the need to engage male workers and family members in these efforts, and to strengthen collaboration among government, producers and NGOs.[24]

[24] IDH. 2024. Women's Safety Accelerator Fund 2.0 Kicks Off to Empower Women and Youth in Tea Communities.

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[22] UN Women. 2018. A Global Women's Safety Framework in Rural Spaces: Informed by experience in the tea sector.
[23] IDH. 2023. Women's Safety Accelerator Fund

3.2 WAYS OF WORKING THAT SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY

3.2.1 Working in partnership

No single sustainability system or standard can or should aim to directly intervene at all levels and in all aspects of gender equality. Instead, sustainability systems need to **identify in which domains, where and how they are best placed to deliver** given their strengths and expertise and which areas would benefit from working in partnerships with external actors at multiple scales. If the target is to shift policies and legal frameworks, for example, then it may involve engaging with local and national governments. If the strategy concerns addressing gender-based violence or discriminatory social norms in communities, then local women's rights experts or organisations are likely better positioned than sustainability systems to design and deliver programming.

Sustainability systems can work on establishing and building partnerships and collective efforts towards gender equality, and funding ongoing work by grassroots women's rights organisations or specialised agencies or groups aligned with their objectives.

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY

Trustea : Working in partnership

Prevention of sexual harassment and compliance to the relevant Indian law is a Zero Tolerance Criteria of Trustea. The programme implementation ensures that this provides the assurance of compliance to this requirement to the verified entities on the ground.

The programme provides training to the Management and Employees on prevention of sexual harassment which is also verified during the 3rd party assessment. In order to have deeper impact and sharing of knowledge, Trustea relies on partnership at different level.

The Trustea governing council includes a representative from UN Women serving in an advisory capacity to provide expertise on its approaches to ensuring women's safety.

It also partners with the Women's Safety Accelerator Fund to build awareness and understanding of gender-based violence in the tea industry. This has involved working with and strengthening the capacity of local NGOs to be able to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY

#### Aquaculture Stewardship Council: Working in partnership

The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) is a key sponsor of the Women in Ocean Food Innovation Studio, which is targeted at female founders in the seafood industry. The programme is run by Hatch, a global venture capital firm and accelerator programme for the aquaculture industry, in partnership with Conservation International Ventures and Konservasi Indonesia.

"Gender equality is one of the critical aspects of sustainable aquaculture that the ASC programme works towards," says Roy van Daatselaar, Global Lead of the ASC Improver Programme. "We recognise that to unlock its full potential within the aquaculture industry, we need to go beyond certification. This is why we are partnering with the Hatch Women in Ocean Food programme. It is a unique initiative to support female entrepreneurs in the blue foods industry and nourish a diverse network of future leaders."

3.2.2 Advocating for structural change

The Gender at Work Framework (Figure 2) provides one useful way for sustainability systems to understand how to develop holistic strategies that addresses structural barriers to gender equality.[25] It identifies four quadrants of change required to achieve gender equality: along the individual to systemic (or structural) and informal to formal axes.

Figure 2: The Gender at Work framework
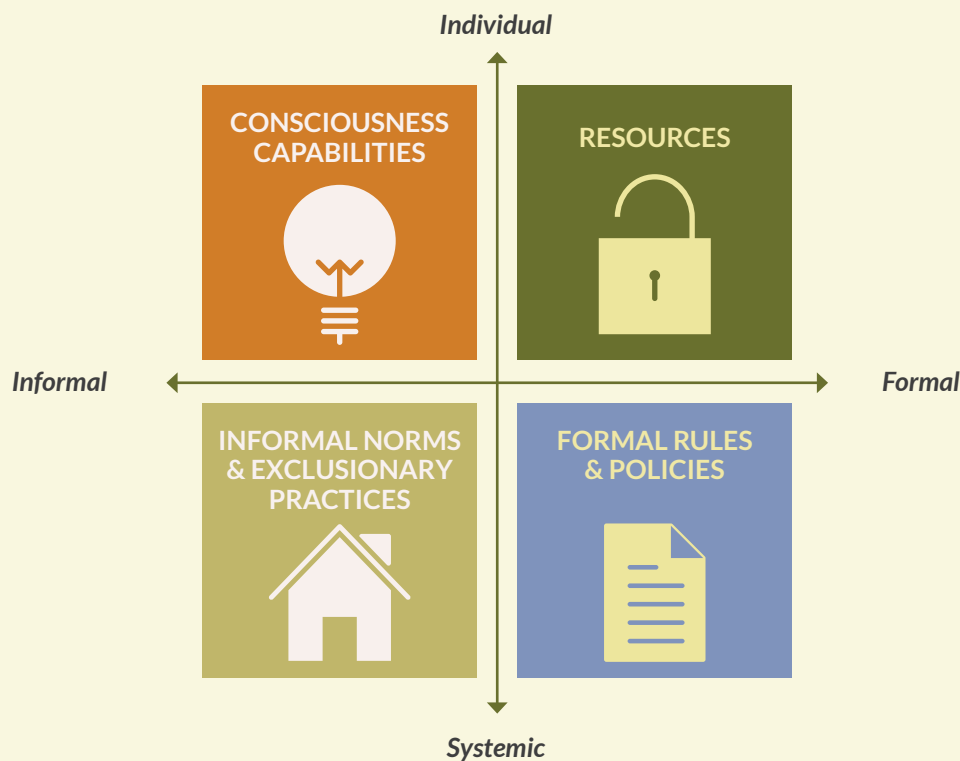
Currently, interventions tend to target only individual-level changes (for example, including women producers in existing training or seeking to increase women's incomes) – the top half of the framework. T**hese need to be complemented with approaches that target changing systems and structures** – including 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.

For example, it could include advocating for formal laws that secure women's land rights and policies that support the redistribution of unpaid care responsibilities. It may involve working with partners who facilitate group reflections on the impact of discriminatory sociocultural norms for both men and women and engaging male allies to advocate against gender-based violence in their communities.

Although sustainability systems alone are not expected to address all the structural causes of gender inequality, they can **help to influence the debate and draw public attention to gender and social injustices along supply chains**.[26] Sustainability systems will need to reflect on their unique strengths and potential contributions to gender equality within the larger system in which they are embedded, with the guidance of subject matter experts and potential partners.

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[25]   The original Gender At Work framework has been used and adapted for many contexts. See Oxfam's Conceptual Framework on Women's Economic Empowerment and Shakun et al (2021) for more ideas on how the framework can apply to supporting gender equality in value chains. Fairtrade International (2016) adopted the framework for its five-year gender strategy 2016-2020.

[26]   See more at Smith, S. 2020. Advancing Gender Equality Through Voluntary Standards for Trade.

READ MORE

Leveraging Voluntary Sustainability Standards for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture

Kathleen Sexsmith, 2019

This guidance identifies actions that can promote the effectiveness of sustainability systems and leverage them as a tool for gender equality and women's empowerment. The recommendations for advocacy include:

- Promote and **advocate for women's more stable and secure rights to land** in coordination with efforts to support certification and certified producers. For women to fully reap the benefits of certification, including premium prices, access to production information and extension, and the ability to take out credit, they require secure and equal land rights.
- **Advocate for the importance of girls' education**, from primary through secondary schooling and beyond, with local families, institutions and governments.

READ MORE

The UN Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture has published useful resources on gender transformative approaches, including:

- A technical note on the theory of change for gender transformative programming for food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, which offers a conceptual framework for designing and implementing gender equality work with a transformational and sustainable impact. It also provides examples of how the theory of change was used in two pilot projects.
- A Compendium of Good Practices on Gender Transformative Approaches, showcasing good practices for supporting changes towards gender equality that also contribute to food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture. The approaches shared can be applied at individual, family/household, group/community and institutional levels, with diverse partners (e.g., NGOs, civil society organisations, local and district governments).

4. GENERATING AND USING DATA ON GENDER EQUALITY

Sustainability systems and standards are designed to define and assess sustainability-focused performance. Yet, they face a range of challenges to **generate reliable data on women's empowerment and gender equality** and use that data to inform decision-making.

In a 2022 scoping study, sustainability systems stakeholders consistently pointed to two main data challenges:

- Lack of robust evidence on the current state of gender equality in supply chains

- Lack of capacity and tools to measure changes in gender equality over time, and especially the impact of standards on gender equality.

This section identifies key resources to help sustainability systems collect useful data and evidence to support their gender equality aims.

The importance of gender-disaggregated data

For sustainability systems working on gender equality, gender-disaggregated data is necessary to:

Bring visibility to gender inequality issues in supply chains

Doing gender-specific research and analysis is necessary to understand the range of issues that sustainability systems stakeholders confront and need to address in a given context. Good gender analyses can support understanding the root causes of gender inequalities.

Learn and adapt strategies

Regularly collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data is critical to understand what strategies and interventions are working, or not. Monitoring data can equip stakeholders and decision-makers with the information they need to adapt ongoing initiatives or change strategies in order to maximise positive outcomes while reducing any potential adverse impacts.
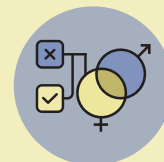
Track progress against gender equality targets

Insights from monitoring and evaluation can support more gender-responsive policy and programme development over time. Consistent reporting against gender equality targets holds stakeholders accountable for meeting their stated ambitions and provides reflection points to adjust targets and indicators if required.

4.1 GENDER RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

For sustainability systems, gender-specific research and analysis generally seeks to understand if, how, and why issues affect women and men differently and unequally in a value chain or a landscape, and what options exist to address them. It also encompasses the larger enabling environment, for example, the informal and formal institutions, structures and cultures that shape the rights, responsibilities, benefits and vulnerabilities of women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity. **Gender analysis should go beyond looking at the 'symptoms' of gender inequalities** to also identify the root causes.

Gender analysis can be applied to any sector, policy area, programme or development context and can be conducted at various levels. While this section focuses on doing a gender analysis to better understand a supply chain or landscape, other resources have already been highlighted in the toolkit to support a gender analysis of a workplace (Section 1) and a gender analysis to inform standards development (Section 2).

4.1.1 Gender-sensitive value chain analysis

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.[27]

The FAO (2016) provides a framework (Figure 3) as well as practical tools, guiding questions, and additional resources to conduct such an analysis.

Gender-sensitive value chain analysis requires the following steps:

STEP	DESCRIPTION AND TOOLS
Assessing the broader context from a gender perspective	Understanding the socio-cultural norms that shape expectations about women's and men's appropriate roles and responsibilities in a given context. This requires retrieving sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive information. See Data and Resource hubs for some example databases.
Gender-sensitive value chain mapping	The exercise maps all actors involved in a value chain, their interactions and power relations. It identifies the steps in which value is added to the product before it reaches the market. Conducting such a mapping exercise from a gender perspective provides insights on the gender division of labour along the chain. It can reveal how both women and men participate in each node of the chain, what specific tasks they perform, and how they interact with other actors. See tools for gender-sensitive value chain mapping listed in the FAO guidelines (p.22-27)
Analysis of gender-based constraints	A crucial part of the analysis is to identify the gender-based constraints (at individual, household and value chain levels) that explain why women are often unable to develop their full productive and entrepreneurial potential and participate in value chains on an equal basis with men. See FAO's Matrix for Activity Mapping to identify gender-based constraints in the FAO guidelines (p.29-38)

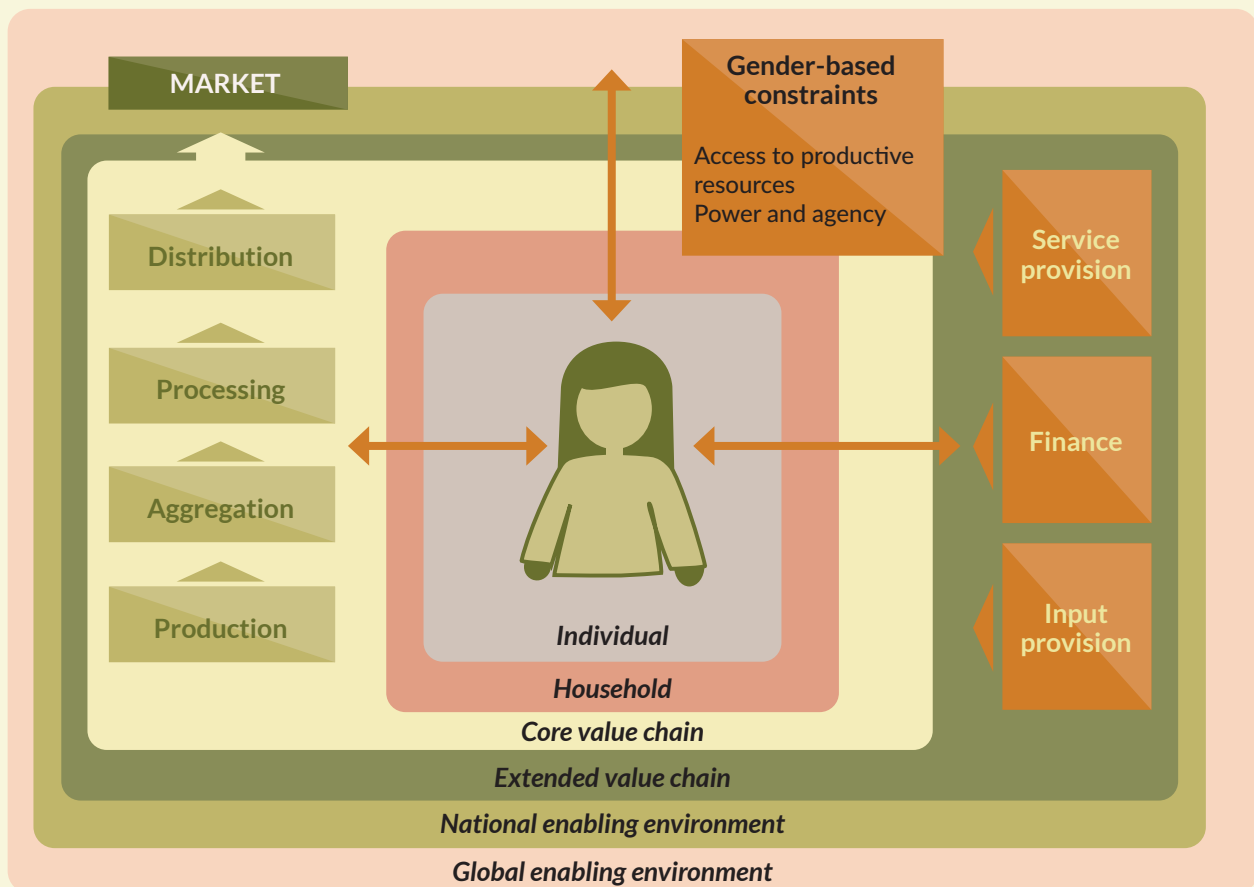27 FAO. 2016. Developing gender-sensitive value chains.

Figure 3: Gender-sensitive value chain framework (FAO, 2016)

4.1.2 Gender benchmarking

Sector-wide benchmarks for the private sector: Gender benchmarks

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.

A benchmarking approach entails identifying several measurement areas and their respective importance applied to a specific context. WBA's gender benchmarks calculate a company's performance in gender equality and women's empowerment based on a methodology and a set of 34 indicators that are used to assesses a company's performance in the workplace and supply chain contexts in the following seven areas:

- ☑ Governance and strategy
- ☑ Representation
- ☑ Compensation and benefits
- ☑ Health and well-being
- ☑ Violence and harassment
- ☑ Marketplace
- ☑ Community.

WBA's resources and past benchmarks

4.2 GENDER-RESPONSIVE MONITORING

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. Monitoring and reporting progress made with a gender lens can help maximise positive outcomes and minimise adverse impacts for women and girls, while holding stakeholders accountable for meeting their stated ambitions.

There is no one right way to do gender-responsive monitoring. Organisations must decide on a monitoring system that suits their targeted outcomes and resources. But at minimum, a gender-responsive monitoring system should include the following elements:

- Disaggregated data
- Multiple types of changes
- Multiple levels of change
- Both quantitative and qualitative indicators
- Tracking of unintended outcomes
- Diverse sources and methods for generating evidence
- Multiple dimensions or thematic areas
- An empowering and ethical process.

Developing effective and meaningful gender-responsive monitoring approaches was highlighted as a key learning priority in a 2022 scoping study with ISEAL members. In response, a rapid scoping review was conducted to identify the range of gender-responsive monitoring approaches available for agrifood stakeholders.

The resulting guidance document:

- **Provides an overview of gender-responsive monitoring**, including suggested steps and elements for those seeking to develop or improve their monitoring approaches.
- **Offers a curated shortlist of turnkey resources** appropriate for different agrifood stakeholders.
- **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.

Key resource

Gender-Responsive Monitoring Approaches for Agrifood Stakeholders
2023

GENDER-RESPONSIVE MONITORING APPROACHES FOR AGRIFOOD STAKEHOLDERS

As agrifood stakeholders increasingly strive to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment, it is critical that they develop effective gender-responsive monitoring systems to track progress and guide decision-making.

This brief aims to:
- Provide an overview of gender-responsive monitoring approaches, including suggested steps and elements for those seeking to develop or improve their monitoring approaches;
- Offer a curated shortlist of turnkey resources appropriate for different agrifood stakeholders; and
- Introduce the Gender Equality in Agrifood Systems: Indicator List (GEASIL), a list of nearly 400 illustrative indicators that can be used to assemble a tailored set of indicators.

For more information on the indicators included in the Gender Equality in Agrifood Systems: Indicator List, please visit: Mora, C.; Morgan, M.; Elias, M. (2023) *Gender equality in agrifood systems: Indicator list (GEASIL).* Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) and Bioversity International: Rome, Italy.

4.2.1 Selecting gender-responsive indicators

A critical part of designing a gender-responsive monitoring system is selecting the indicators that best align with the organisation's gender equality goals and strategies. Sustainability systems that are starting out may want to use and adapt existing resources. In a brief on gender-responsive monitoring (introduced above), Sustainable Agriculture Network and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT provide a shortlist of turnkey resources for that purpose.

If an existing toolkit or framework of gender-responsive indicators is not suitable, it may be necessary to select a basket of indicators that capture multiple types of changes across multiple dimensions and that use different measurement methods.

Among other considerations, indicators should match the approaches or intervention strategies used. Sustainability systems may select approaches and intervention strategies that aim to 'reach', 'benefit' and/or 'empower' women. They can also strive to 'transform' – that is, include gender transformative approaches that aim to address the structural barriers and systems that perpetuate gender inequalities (as discussed in Section 3.2.2). Monitoring tools and indicators need to be relevant to these different ambitions and initiatives – illustrative examples are shown in Figure 4 below.

Reach
Reach women as well as men as project participants.

Benefit
Deliver access to resources and benefits to women and men; Increase women's well-being (food security, income, health, etc.).

Empower
Strengthen the ability of women and men to develop and implement strategic life choices, in a context where they previously could not do so.

Transform
Address the root causes of gender inequality. The focus is on building agency and changing unequal power relations and discriminatory social institutions.

	TYPES OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES	MEASUREMENT FOCUS
Reach	• Invite women to participate. • Reduce barriers to women's participation. • Use quota system for training events.	• Number of women participating in training session. • Proportion of population that receive agricultural extension services, by sex.
Benefit	• Target practical gendered needs, such as increase women's food security, income, health, etc. • Increase women's access to resources and assets. • Address different preferences and constraints to ensure women as well as men benefit.	• Proportion of population who have secure ownership over productive assets, by sex. • Average income of small-small food producers, by sex and indigenous status. • Prevalence of undernourishment, by sex.
Empower	• Enhance women's decision-making powers in households and communities. • Facilitate women's organizations to identify and address women's strategic gender interests. • Address key areas of disempowerment.	• Changes in women's decision-making power over agricultural production or income. • Changes in women's control over assets and/or their purchase or sale. • Reduction in outcomes associated with disempowerment (e.g. gender-based violence, time burden).
Transform	• Influence changes to structural barriers and gender norms to empower women and men and advance gender equality. • Promote gender-equitable masculinities.	• Changes in unequal power relations between men and women. • Changes in gender norms, measured by: people's perception of the norm over time; changes in attitudes/beliefs and related statements; people's perceptions about certain behaviours (i.e. how wrong or right they are) and how others in their community would react; and evidence of behavioural change. • Changes in law and policy, from gender-blind laws/policies to those that purposefully address the underlying causes of gender inequality.

Source: Adapted from Johnson et al. (2018) and CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agrifood Systems (2017)

Figure 4: Monitoring tools and indicators for reach, benefit, empower and transform strategies

Key resource

Gender Equality in Agrifood Systems: Indicator List (GEASIL)

Sustainable Agriculture Network and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, 2023

Sustainable Agriculture Network and the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT offer a consolidated list of nearly 400 illustrative indicators, selected and curated from over 1,500 original indicators identified in a scoping review. The list of indicators is not exhaustive and can be used in combination with other searchable indicator databases (a short list of databases is included in the companion brief on gender-responsive monitoring). It is intended to serve as a starting point and inspiration for exploring a variety of gender equality-related changes, drawing on existing measures from gender-responsive interventions and corresponding monitoring systems.
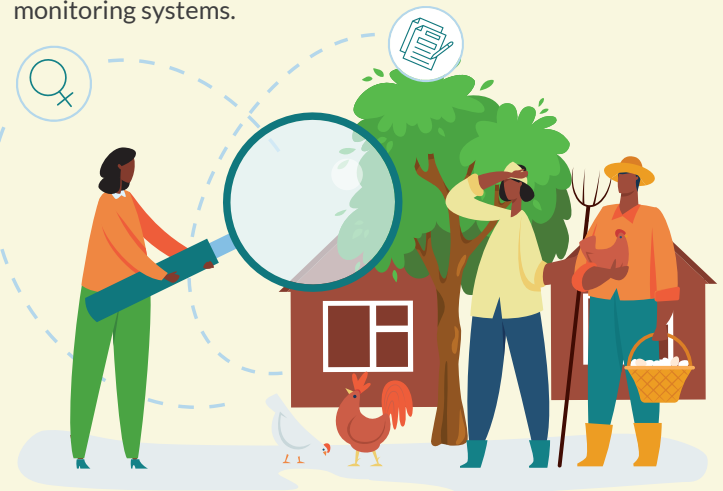
ISEAL COMMUNITY MEMBER CASE STUDY

Fair Trade USA: Key Performance Indicators related to SDG 5

Fair Trade USA's impact management system tracks, among other impacts, the direct and meaningful contributions that its standards make to the SDGs, including to SDG 5 (Gender Equality).[28]

Key performance indicators that are tracked to understand the impact of Fair Trade certification on women include:

- **%** of Fair Trade Committees that are representative of programme participants' gender
- **%** of female programme participants who feel valued equally to their male counterpart
- **%** of female programme participants with access to and decision-making power over credit
- **%** of female farmers who identify as a co-farmer of the land they farm
- **%** of female farmers that feel they had equal opportunity to be part of Fair Trade
- **%** of female workers who feel they are compensated for their work equally to their male counterpart
- **%** of female workers who feel they are able to start or grow their family while working at that job if they wanted to

[28]   Fair Trade USA. 2022. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Fair Trade Model.

4.3 GENDER-RESPONSIVE EVALUATION

UN Women defines gender-responsive evaluation as "systematic and impartial assessment that provides credible and reliable evidence-based information about the extent to which an intervention has resulted in progress (or the lack thereof) towards intended and/or unintended results for gender equality and the empowerment of women".[29] Gender-responsive evaluation processes can themselves act to empower rights-holders by engaging women and girls.

READ MORE

Good practices in gender-responsive evaluations
UN Women, 2020

This knowledge product showcases good practice and tools used to improve the effectiveness of gender-responsive evaluation approaches and methods.

Its tools and resources can be used to **assess and interpret gender equality outcomes** of sustainability systems' programmes or interventions. These include mixed-method evaluations (based primarily on desktop analysis and interviews) and more in-depth evaluation methods that can capture the complex picture of gender equality outcomes.

In 2022, UN Women added other assessment tools to help practitioners evaluate the impacts of gender-focused interventions. See UN Women Evaluation handbook: How to manage gender-responsive evaluation.

The FAO and partners have produced guidelines that present an overarching framework for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture, including key dimensions and spheres of influence within which gender transformative change can be measured.

The resource provides step-by-step guidance to **formulate qualitative and quantitative indicators** of gender transformative change to help teams in their efforts to design, implement, monitor and evaluate gender transformative interventions. These indicators should be distinct from and a complement to other reach, benefit and empower indicators intended to contribute to gender equality outcomes.

Key resource

Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture

FAO, IFAD, WFP & CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform 2023

Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture

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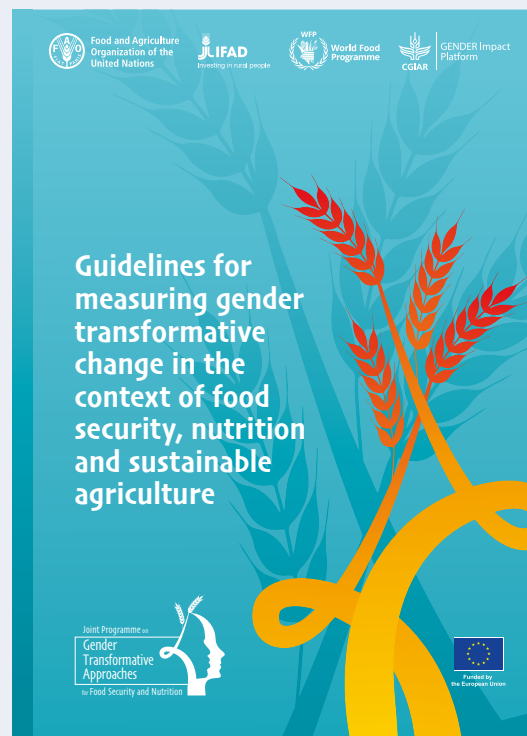
[29]   UN Women. 2022. Evaluation handbook: How to manage gender-responsive evaluation.

4.4 GENDER-RESPONSIVE RESULTS REPORTING

Good practice on reporting and claims of sustainability performance can be found in the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems and the ISEAL Credibility Principles.

A **robust reporting process** must embed transparency, impartiality, stakeholder engagement, truthfulness, and a commitment to continual improvement.

Sustainability systems should develop a structured reporting framework to outline their specific gender equality objectives, scope of work, measurement indicators, progress and outcomes. This framework should incorporate both quantitative data, such as gender representation metrics and pay equity analyses, and qualitative insights gathered in the data collection process.

Regularly publishing reports that detail progress and challenges not only fosters accountability but encourages trust in sustainability systems' commitments to gender equality.

HOW-TO

Include critical elements in gender-responsive results-reporting

- Describe what was achieved, with the indicators or evidence of success;
- Describe the process of change;
- Compare actual results with expected or intended results;
- Quantify the results achieved against the baseline data;
- Illustrate results findings through different qualitative methods: narratives, case studies, 'most significant change' examples, or testimonials;
- Describe unintended impacts;
- Explain over- or under-achievement against the intended results;
- Describe stakeholder perceptions of the change and results;
- Identify promising practices and lessons learned;
- Assess the sustainability of results achieved, identifying possible risk factors; and
- Make recommendations for improvements.

Source: UN Women. 2022. Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results

Key Resource

The Delta Framework

Better Cotton, the Global Coffee Platform (GCP), the International Coffee Organisation (ICO), and the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), 2022

An ISEAL Innovations Fund project led by Better Cotton, which ran from February 2019 to June 2022, led to the development of the Delta Framework. This was designed to be a turnkey monitoring framework to bridge the gap in measuring and reporting of sustainability performance.

The project started with the cotton and coffee sectors, bringing together two leading standard organisations (Better Cotton and the Global Coffee Platform), working closely with the International Cotton Advisory Committee and the International Coffee Association to ensure the framework supports businesses, governments and producers alike.

Comprised of impact indicators, guiding principles and data standardisation and digitisation, the framework created a shared language and approach aligned to the SDGs to measure and communicate sustainability performance globally.

The framework includes a composite indicator for women's empowerment, developed in partnership with CARE International UK. It is made up of 6 sub-indicators across three domains: i) leadership, ii) decision-making, and iii) control of economic assets (for smallholder farms) or gender equality in the workplace (for large farms).

The full Delta Framework package is available online. For more information, see Annex 5 of the framework.

CONCLUSION

Sustainability systems, including voluntary sustainability standards and systems (VSS) can advance gender equality when they are committed to this goal at the highest levels and have clear strategies and investments to achieve it. In this toolkit, we identified specific entry points, opportunities and mechanisms that sustainability systems can use to promote gender equality:

- **In their workplace**, through policies and processes to ensure that women within their own organisations have access to fair wages, leadership positions, and equitable opportunities and working conditions.
- **In their standards**, by preventing harm and proactively supporting gender equality within the standard itself.
- **In their programmes**, including by targeting structural barriers to gender equality, such as unequal access to resources.

The toolkit also addressed **data and measurement considerations** for sustainability systems to advance gender equality and report on progress made on gender-related goals. As powerful agents of change, sustainability systems can catalyse and help sustain momentum towards gender equality, particularly in sectors where sustainability systems are widely adopted, such as agriculture and manufacturing.

DATA AND RESOURCE HUBS

SELECTED RESOURCES

RESOURCES ON SEX/GENDER-DISAGGREGATED DATA

The World Bank publishes a series of sex-disaggregated and gender indicators on agriculture, education, health, social development and poverty. The World Bank's Gender Data Portal provides gender statistics through narratives and data visualisations to improve the understanding of gender data and facilitate analyses.

- World Bank Group: Sex-disaggregated and gender indicators
- World Bank Group: Gender Data Portal

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provides data and country factsheets analysing the level of discrimination in laws, social norms and practices in 179 countries, across a variety of themes: child marriage, inheritance, unpaid domestic or healthcare work, domestic violence, reproductive health rights, access to property rights, land and non-land assets, the right to work, participation in politics, and access to justice.

- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): www.genderindex.org

OTHER USEFUL DATABASES AND RESOURCE HUBS INCLUDE:

- UN STATS: Gender Statistics
- EUROSTAT: Gender Statistics
- International Labour Organization: https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/women/
- UN Development Programme: Gender Inequality Index
- European Institute for Gender Equality: Gender Statistics Database
- UN Economic Commission for Europe: Gender Statistics
- FAO: Country Gender Assessment (CGA) in agriculture and rural sector

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ANNEX 1: KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

GLOSSARY AND LANGUAGE GUIDES

The following resources provide definitions of key concepts used in this toolkit:

- UN Women – Gender Equality Glossary
- UN Women - Concepts and definitions
- OXFAM - Inclusive Language Guide

DEFINITIONS

Gender:

"Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women [and other genders]. In addition to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable.

Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, as are other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis including class, race, poverty level, ethnic group, sexual orientation, age, etc."[30]

Gender audit:

A gender audit is a process that helps organisations assess how effectively they are integrating gender equality into their policies, practices and work culture.[31] It identifies gaps, challenges and opportunities for improvement at the individual, work unit and organisational levels, while also highlighting good practice. A gender audit reviews internal processes, evaluates progress in gender mainstreaming, and provides recommendations for fostering gender equality. It encourages organisational learning and strengthens commitment to gender equality initiatives. A *participatory* gender audit is based on participatory methodologies that promote organisational learning.

Gender equality:

Gender equality means ensuring that women, men, boys and girls have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities, which should not be determined by whether they are born male or female.[32] It involves addressing the diverse needs and priorities of both women and men, by considering not just gender, but also how other factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age and disability shape their experiences.[33] Gender equality recognises that women and men are not homogeneous groups and that efforts must actively address and dismantle overlapping systems of discrimination and privilege, such as patriarchy, racism, homophobia, colonialism, imperialism and ableism, to create a more just and inclusive society.[34] Gender equality is not solely a women's issue; it requires the active involvement and commitment of all genders.

[30]   UN Women Gender Equality Glossary
[31]   ILO. 2008. ILO Participatory Gender Audit: A tool for organizational change
[32]   UN Women Gender Equality Glossary
[33]   Hankivsky et al. 2014. An intersectionality-based policy analysis framework: critical reflections on a methodology for advancing equity
[34]   UN Women. 2022. Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results.

Gender equity:

Gender equity is the concept of fair treatment for all genders according to their respective needs.[35] This may involve either equal treatment or differentiated treatment that is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

Considering that gender equity denotes an element of interpretation of social justice, which is often to the detriment of women, the preferred terminology by the UN is "gender equality", as emphasised at the Beijing Conference in 1995 and within CEDAW General Recommendation 28.[36]

Gender integration continuum:

Several frameworks support an understanding of the extent to which gender considerations are integrated in projects, programmes and policies. These frameworks typically depict levels of gender integration along a continuum, moving from gender blind or gender exploitative to gender transformative. Some of the common terms used in these frameworks include:[37]

- **Gender blind**: "Policies and programs that ignore gender considerations altogether. Designed without prior analysis of the culturally-defined set of economic, social, and political roles; responsibilities; rights; entitlements; obligations; and power relations associated with being female and male; and the dynamics between and among men and women, boys and girls."

- **Gender aware**: "Policies and programs that examine and address the culturally-defined set of economic, social, and political roles; responsibilities; rights; entitlements; obligations; and power relations associated with being female and male; and the dynamics between and among men and women, boys and girls."

- **Gender exploitative**: "Policies and programs that intentionally or unintentionally reinforce or take advantage of gender inequalities and stereotypes in pursuit of project outcomes, or whose approach exacerbates inequalities. These inequalities and stereotypes are harmful and can undermine program objectives in the long run."

- **Gender accommodating**: "Policies and programs that acknowledge but work around gender differences and inequalities to achieve project objectives. Although this approach may result in short-term benefits and realization of outcomes, it does not attempt to reduce gender inequality or address gender systems that contribute to differences and inequalities."

- **Gender sensitive**: "The ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues, and inequalities and incorporate these into strategies and actions."[38]

- **Gender responsive:** "Addressing the different situations, roles, needs, and interests of women, men, girls, and boys in the design and implementation of activities, policies, and programs. A program, policy, or activity that is gender-responsive addresses gender-based barriers, respects gender differences, enables structures, systems, and methodologies to be sensitive to gender, ensures gender parity is a wider strategy to advance gender equality, and evolves to close gaps and eradicate gender-based discrimination."[39]

- **Gender transformative**: "Policies and programs that seek to transform gender relations to promote equality and achieve program objectives by: 1. Fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms, and dynamics. 2. Recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment. 3. Promoting the relative position of women, girls, and marginalized groups, and transforming the underlying social structures, policies, and broadly held social norms that perpetuate gender inequalities."[40]

The Interagency Gender Working Group (IAWG) specifies that the "overall objective of gender integration is to move toward gender transformative programs and policies, thus gradually challenging existing gender inequities and promoting positive changes in gender roles, norms, and power dynamics."[41]

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[35] ISEAL. 2020. Mainstreaming gender equality considerations within multistakeholder initiatives
[36] UN Women Gender Equality Glossary; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 2010. General recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
[37] IGWG. The Gender Integration Continuum.
[38] INEE. Glossary: Gender sensitivity
[39] INEE. Glossary: Gender responsive
[40] IGWG. The Gender Integration Continuum
[41] IGWG. The Gender Integration Continuum

Gender-responsive standards:

These are standards that acknowledge the distinct needs of different genders and take concerted action to ensure the efficacy of the standard for all. It is not a separate standard for different genders, but rather a means of ensuring that the impact of the standard is appropriate for all genders and provides equitable benefits. Balanced representation and equitable measures in the process of standards development are crucial to better respond to the priorities of all genders.[42]

Intersectionality:

Intersectionality refers to the ways that multiple forms of discrimination linked to social identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, caste, socio-economic status and age, among others, intersect and are compounded to create unique social positions and daily lived experiences.[43] The concept recognises that the interaction of various social inequalities within interconnected structures of power contributes to mutually reinforcing forms of privilege and oppression rooted in systems like colonialism, racism and patriarchy.[44]

Social inclusion:

The process of ensuring that all individuals, especially marginalised and vulnerable groups, have equitable opportunities to participate and benefit in all aspects of social life. It involves enhancing social bonds, expanding access, and addressing inequalities to achieve social justice and cohesion. This includes engaging diverse groups, such as women and girls, people with disabilities, and minorities, in the decisions that affect their lives, ensuring their full participation and recognition. Social inclusion inherently encompasses gender equality by focusing on removing barriers and guaranteeing equal opportunities and rights for all, including women and girls.

Sustainability systems and Voluntary Sustainability Standards and Standards (VSS)

Sustainability systems are market-based tools that address social and environmental challenges by defining responsible practices, assessing their implementation, and measuring and communicating results. Used across various sectors, these systems connect consumers and producers, promote sustainability improvements, and provide confidence to regulators, investors, businesses, and consumers by recognising good and improving sustainability performance.[45]

Voluntary Sustainability Systems and Standards (VSS) are a type of sustainability system. They are market-based mechanisms, often founded by private parties (such as NGOs), that aim to address social and environmental challenges by setting and measuring responsible performance standards for actors across value chains.

Women's rights:

"Non-discrimination and equality between women and men are central principles of human rights law. Both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex and guarantee women and men equality in the enjoyment of the rights covered by the Covenants[...]

The work of activists, human rights mechanisms and States has been critical in ensuring that the human rights framework has grown and adjusted to encapsulate the gender-specific dimensions of human rights violations in order to better protect women. Effectively ensuring women's human rights requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying societal structures and power relations that define and influence women's ability to enjoy their human rights. These power structures have an impact on all aspects of life, from law and politics, to economic and social policy, family and community life."[46]

[42] UNECE. 2022. Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards

[43] The term was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in her 1989 paper Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989(1):8.

[44] UN Women. 2022. Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results

[45] ISEAL. What is a sustainability system?

[46] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner Women's rights are human rights

ANNEX 2: INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS SUPPORTING GENDER EQUALITY IN MARKET SYSTEMS

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS):

Adopted in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines 17 goals aimed at fostering a sustainable future. Gender equality is a fundamental human right, and 'Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls' is explicitly identified as Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). Gender equality and women's empowerment are also integral to each of the SDGs,[47] as they are essential for justice, inclusive economies and environmental sustainability.[48]

The global targets for SDG 5 are:

- **SDG 5.1:** End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- **SDG 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
- **SDG 5.3:** Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- **SDG 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
- **SDG 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
- **SDG 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 and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences
- **SDG 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.
- **SDG 5.B:** Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
- **SDG 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

As of 2023, only 15.4% of SDG 5 indicators are "on track" for achieving these targets.

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[47] UN Women. 2018. Why gender equality matters across all SDGs.
[48] UN Women. In focus: Women and the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW):

Women's rights are promoted under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which reflects over 30 years of work by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The Convention defines what discrimination against women is and lays out a clear, actionable framework for governments to eliminate it. Countries that have ratified CEDAW are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. Many countries develop a national action plan for the implementation of the CEDAW Committee's recommendations, and countries are committed to submit reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations. CEDAW and its Recommendations are useful tools to assess and promote the integration of gender equality concerns in national policy processes that are relevant to value chain development.[49]

THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION (ILO) CONVENTIONS:

The ILO has several conventions that promote gender equality and prohibit gender-based discrimination:

CONVENTION	DESCRIPTION
Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)	Adopted by the ILO on 29 June 1951 and effective from 23 May 1953. This Convention establishes the principle of equal pay for men and women for work of equal value. It requires countries to ensure equal remuneration through laws, collective agreements, or other means. It also promotes objective job evaluations and cooperation with employers' and workers' organisations.
Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)	Adopted by the ILO on 21 June 2019 and effective from 25 June 2021. Aims to eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence. It requires member states to implement comprehensive measures to prevent and address these issues across all sectors. The convention can be denounced from 25 June 2031.
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)	Adoptd by the ILO on 25 June 1958 and effective from 15 June 1960. This convention combats combat discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, sex, religion, and other factors. It requires countries to promote equal opportunity and treatment, work with employers and workers' groups, and apply the convention to all territories. Special protective measures are allowed.
Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)	Adopted by the ILO on 23 June 1981 and effective from 11 August 1983. Addresses the need for equal opportunities for workers with family responsibilities. It mandates non-discrimination, equal treatment, and support for both men and women with caregiving duties. The Convention requires support measures to accommodate family responsibilities in employment and community services, ensuring that family duties do not justify job termination.
Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)	Adopted by the ILO on 15 June 2000 and effective from 7 February 2002. Revises the 1952 Maternity Protection Convention to promote gender equality and protect the health of mothers and children. It sets standards for maternity leave (at least 14 weeks, with six weeks post-childbirth), health protection, and non-discrimination. It requires member states to provide adequate maternity leave, health benefits, and job protection.

[49]   See the UN Human Rights Treaty Body Database

THE UN GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS (UNGPs):

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) are the global authoritative standard to prevent, mitigate and remediate business-related adverse human rights violations. They require companies to avoid infringing on rights, address adverse impacts, and provide remedies for affected individuals across their entire supply chains, grounded in due diligence, transparency and accountability in business operations.

Conscious that women and girls experience adverse impacts of business activities differently and often disproportionately, UN agencies have recognised that measures taken by states and business enterprises to implement the UNGPs must be gender responsive. In 2019, the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights and the UNDP developed gender guidance for the UNGPs.[50] For each principle, it includes gender guidance and illustrative actions to integrate gender perspectives.

THE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES (WEPs):

The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), established by UN Women and the UN Global Compact, provide businesses with guidance on promoting gender equality and empowering women in the workplace, marketplace and community. Based on international labour and human rights standards, the WEPs highlight the responsibility of businesses to foster gender equality through actions such as ensuring equal pay, adopting gender-responsive supply chain practices and implementing zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

The seven principles cover leadership, fair treatment, employee well-being, education, enterprise development, community engagement and reporting. By adopting WEPs, companies commit to advancing gender equality and aligning with the 2030 Agenda and UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The WEPs website provides tools, including thematic guides, public policies and ally insights for advancing gender equality in the workplace, marketplace and community.

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[50]   UNDP. 2019. Gender Dimensions of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

ANNEX 3: UNECE DECLARATION FOR GENDER RESPONSIVE STANDARDS AND STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies published a Recommendation on Gender-Responsive Standards in 2017. This recommendation includes a declaration to which standards development organisations can become signatories, reflecting their engagement to develop inclusive standards.

The full text of the declaration can be accessed on the UNECE website in seven languages and an excerpt is below.

We, as a national / regional / international standards body / standards development organization:

■ Acknowledge Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
■ Acknowledge the pervasive and influential role of standards in society;
■ Acknowledge that representation of women in standards development is almost always below parity and that the outcomes for men and women are not explicitly addressed during the standards development process;
■ Recognize that the content of standards and engaging in the standards development process are opportunities for women's empowerment;
■ Recognize that different national / regional / international standards bodies / standards development organizations operate in different ways and within different infrastructures;
■ Express our resolve to work towards:

- gender inclusive standards development organizations;
- gender responsive standards;
- gender balance at all levels within our wider infrastructure (including in governing bodies);
- enhanced expertise to create and deliver gender inclusivity;

And therefore, we hereby pledge to make standards and the standards development process gender responsive by:

■ Affirming this Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development Declaration;
■ Creating and proactively implementing a gender action plan for our organization;
■ Tracking progress, collecting and sharing data, success stories and good practices.

The Annex, maintained on the ECE website, supports the Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development. The Annex outlines actions that national / regional / international standards bodies / standards development organizations can include in their gender action plan for gender responsive standards and standards development.

It is for each organization to decide what they can / should include in their gender action plan. The list of actions is not exhaustive; it is intended simply to provide ideas and inspiration for gender action plans for standards development organizations of any type.

Group of actions

1. Working towards gender balanced / representative and inclusive standards development environments

1.1 Strive for a representative number of women in all phases of standards development:

   (i) assess the gender balance of our committees and determine if there is an opportunity to improve;

   (ii) connect with organizations and informal networks within industries and professions to improve the gender balance of our technical committees;

   (iii) collect sex-disaggregated data on participants in standards development (overall and by industry) and compare this with employment statistics (e.g. develop a graph indicating the gender balance on committees and update it annually, and if possible, aggregate it by industry sectors).

1.2 Strive to create a standards development environment which enables gender inclusivity and equality:

   (i) ensure the leadership supports striving for a gender inclusive environment and for gender responsive standards;

   (ii) conduct yearly research with committee members to learn about any differences in experiences in standards development based on gender;

   (iii) develop and implement policies, procedures and activities which support gender inclusivity (e.g. raising awareness; training for committee chairs, programme managers, members; distributing this declaration to all those involved in standards development, etc.);

   (iv) review the gender balance of the chairs / senior roles within standards making and seek to improve it where it is imbalanced.

1.3 Support individuals who want to be gender advocates by encouraging and enabling them to act within their areas of standards development:

   (i) encourage programme/project managers and chairs to promote gender inclusivity on their standards development committees and provide them with tools and resources to do so;

   (ii) share (within and between organizations) information / data / experiences about internal or external gender inclusivity projects to identify and share best practice.

1.4 Strive for gender representative participation in other phases of the standards development process including making proposals, commenting on proposals and commenting on drafts.

1.5 Ensure organizational and individual gender actions plans include relevant objectives so that progress can be monitored and measured.

2.   Creating gender responsive standards

2.1   Strive to develop a network of gender experts to provide a resource to support standards development committees in their work:

2.2   Contribute to the development of a tool(s) suitable for conducting gender-based analysis of all standards in any form of active development (new or revision) to ensure standards are gender responsive in their content and implementation. This tool could be based on Gender-Based Analysis Plus developed by Status of Women Canada, or other methods.

2.3   Provide training for any new tools which may be developed and ensure you are measuring the participation in and impact of this training.

2.4   Use existing frameworks (e.g. the International Organization for Standardization, European Committee for Standardization, European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization, regional standards organizations etc.) to work collaboratively and share resources/expertise.

2.5   Ensure committees have relevant expertise, tools and resources to strive to develop gender responsive standards:

    (i)   provide committees with any necessary training to develop their gender expertise;

    (ii)   ensure committees include a gender expert or have access to gender expertise (e.g. via a network of gender experts).

2.6   Strive to institutionalize successful and effective practices, procedures and policies to ensure the future / sustainability of gender responsive standards development Group of actions

3.   Creating gender responsive standards bodies

3.1   Assess existing and develop / obtain as required the skills and expertise needed to create and implement a gender action plan.

3.2   Collect data on the gender ratio of employees at all different levels.

3.3   Develop training tools to enhance the gender awareness of employees.

3.4   Monitor and record the participation in and impact of any training provided.

ANNEX 4: ITC STANDARDS MAP FOR 'GENDER' THEME

The ITC Standards Map can be accessed here: https://standardsmap.org/en/identify

STANDARDS MAP THEME	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	GUIDANCE
Gender - Policies	Gender issues: general principle	Does the scheme include a general principle addressing gender issues when interacting with local communities?	Refers to the scheme including a general principle respecting equal rights for men and women (e.g. inclusion, and the acknowledgment of the different roles of women and men).
	Criteria on gender policies and best practices	Does the scheme require policy development and implementation of initiatives that promote gender equality?	Refers to the development of policies and the implementation of initiatives that acknowledge and respect equal opportunities on the basis of gender in the workplace as well as when interacting with local communities (e.g. community consultation, dialogue, complaints and disputes, engaging local knowledge).
Gender – Violence and Harassment	Criteria relating to sexual exploitation / harassment	Does the scheme include explicit criteria on sexual harassment to protect all types of workers including permanent, temporary, migrant women and men workers from any type of sexual exploitation or harassment as defined by the ILO?	Refers to sexual harassment, defined (by ILO) as a sex-based behaviour that is unwelcome and offensive to its recipient. Behaviour that qualifies as sexual harassment: physical violence, touching, unnecessary close proximity, verbal comments and questions about appearance, life-style, sexual orientation, offensive phone calls. Non-verbal whistling, sexually-suggestive gestures, display of sexual materials to its recipient.
	Criteria related specifically to non-discrimination based on gender	Does the scheme require policies and/or processes in place that prevent discrimination based specifically on gender in the workplace?	Refers explicitly to having policies and/ or processes in place to prevent discrimination based specifically on gender in the workplace and throughout the working cycle (e.g. hiring, firing, access to training, promotion, terms and conditions of work (excluding compensation), termination, retirement, representation in workers association, representation in higher management, etc.). This prevents gender discriminatory recruitment processes to take place (pregnancy tests or the use of contraception shall not be used as a condition of hiring or continued employment for instance, age and marital status should not part of the recruitment forms, no employee should be asked to sign a blank letter of resignation on hiring etc.).

STANDARDS MAP THEME	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	GUIDANCE
Gender - Agency	Criteria relating to women's rights at work	Does the scheme include explicit criteria to protect women rights at work?	Refers to rights such as regular pay and regular working hours; permanent contracts; safe and non-hazardous work environments; freedom from sexual violence, harassment and forced pregnancy tests, etc.). This criterion goes beyond a non-discrimination clause, or legal compliance. It refers to any process or policy that not only protects women's rights at work but is further aimed at promoting women's (economic) rights (e.g. special quotas for women workers).
	Criteria on grievance committee being gender balanced in its composition	Does the scheme require a grievance mechanisms committee to be in place and being gender balanced in its composition?	Refers to an independent and representative decision-making body in charge of managing grievances and complaints, which is gender-balanced in its composition, in order to be fully representative, to be inclusive of women who are at heightened risk of vulnerability in terms of human rights violations, and of marginalization from grievance mechanisms. A confidential, unbiased, nonretaliatory grievance procedure should be established allowing women and men workers to make comments, recommendations, reports, or complaints concerning their treatment in the workplace including regarding gender equity. References: United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP); OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises.
	Criteria on factoring gender equity considerations in stakeholder engagement process	Does the scheme require equal inclusion on the basis of gender in the stakeholder engagement process?	Refers to stakeholder engagement processes, which are context-specific, meaning that techniques, methods, approaches and timetables need to be tailored to the local situation and the various types of stakeholders being consulted. This criteria refers to a gender-inclusive consultation process based on an awareness that men and women can have differing views and needs.
Gender – Economic opportunities	Criteria on management systems practices to monitor, evaluate and remediate gender specific issues	Does the scheme require to set up management practices to monitor gender specific issues?	Refers to specific criteria covering management systems practices including sex disaggregated data to be able to monitor, evaluate and remediate gender specific issues.
	Criteria on access to financial services for women (payment, credit, savings, subsidies)	Does the scheme explicitly include criteria on access to financial services for women (payment, credit, savings, subsidies).	Refers to requiring specific access to payment, credit, savings, subsidies for women. The scheme organization may play a role in facilitating access to financial products that traditionally have barriers to entry for the most precarious and isolated populations such as women.
	Criteria on family-friendly policies to increase the labour force participation of women	Does the scheme promote active female participation through the implementation of family friendly policies?	Refers to promoting increase in the participation of female workers. Family friendly programmes or policies provide women more equal opportunities to enter the work force and to develop their work (e.g. paid leave and flexible work arrangements).

STANDARDS MAP THEME	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	GUIDANCE
Gender - Leadership	Criteria related to female workers' access to training programs	Does the scheme include criteria on the provision of professional training for women, making suitable arrangements related to time and location?	Refers training that are made accessible to women and that imparts skills and knowledge for personal development and career advancement.
	Criteria on incentives to women to develop their careers (e.g. specific training)	Does the scheme promote incentives for women to develop their careers?	Refers to incentives such as equitable access to specific and specialised training and coaching; employment guidance and counselling services; leadership and management training; increased access to traditionally male dominated training; pay equity plans)
	Criteria on ensuring participation of women/minorities in management	Does the scheme promote the advancement of women and minorities in leadership/ management positions?	Refers to the promotion of women/minorities in management and decisionary positions, ensuring that women/minorities get senior management employment opportunities.
	Criteria on increased access to finance and support services for women entrepreneurs	Does the scheme promote the implementation of gender policies to increase access to finance and support services for women entrepreneurs?	Refers to specific gender policies in place that encourage and promote increased finance and support services for women entrepreneurs (e.g. capacity building, Internet access where women can access information, networking programmes), including access to financial products and services that traditionally have barriers to entry for the most precarious and isolated populations such as women in rural areas. Innovative approaches and partnerships are needed to scale up better access to finance and support services for women entrepreneurs.
	Criteria on development assistance policies which promote the economic role of women	Does the scheme encourage the implementation of development assistance policies aimed at promoting the economic role of women?	Refers to increasing women's access to economic opportunity and thus earnings and productivity through development assistance policies (e.g. improved remuneration for women, child care benefits, paid leave).

STANDARDS MAP THEME	CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	GUIDANCE
Gender – Women's Health and Safety	Criteria on women's access to health and safety services	Does the scheme include criteria related to women specific health and safety issues, especially those related to/affecting pregnancy and breastfeeding?	Refers to the requirements asking to provide access to health and safety services for women workers, taking special considerations to women reproductive health issues (e.g. during pregnancy or nursing periods) (e.g. medical services, safety equipment, uniforms, sanitary facilities, etc.).
	Criteria on special leave (sickness, marriage, family leave)	Does the scheme include criteria related to special leave days, including sickness, marriage, family leave?	Refers to workers being entitled as per national regulations to full paid leave by personal reasons, including death of close relative, workers or relatives' marriage, house moving, etc
	Criteria on maternity protection	Does the scheme include criteria on maternity protection (as defined in ILO 183)?	Refers to entitlement to a period of maternity leave of not less than 14 weeks; the right to prenatal leave in case of (risk of) complications or illness; cash benefits shall be at a level which ensures that the woman can maintain herself and her child in proper conditions of health and with a suitable scheme of living (min. 2/3 or previous earnings); medical benefits (where not provided by the state); the right to return to an equal or equally paid position and the right to breaks to breast-feed--to be counted as working time. REFERENCE: C183 - Maternity Protection Convention, 2000.
	Criteria on child care benefits and on-site day-care facilities	Does the scheme have criteria on childcare benefits and on-site day-care facilities?	Refers to specific criteria asking investments in/provision of day care facilities by the company.
	Criteria on female workers' entitlement to breaks (e.g. meals / breastfeeding breaks)	Does the scheme require entitlement to breaks (e.g. meal breaks) for workers; including appropriate breaks to accommodate pregnant workers?	
	Criteria relating to factoring gender considerations in impacts and risks assessment of production	Does the scheme require the inclusion of gender considerations in impacts and risks assessments frameworks/ mechanisms, including tracking sex disaggregated data?	Refers to impacts and risk assessments developed with the differences between men and women taken into account. (e.g. lifting, twisting, chemical exposure, long hours, stress, and extreme temperatures can affect women more seriously than men due to physical differences. Pregnancy, breast-feeding, menstruation, and menopause can exacerbate these effects.).