

# Women's Empowerment in Global Value Chains

A Framework for Business Action to Advance  
Women's Health, Rights, and Wellbeing



## About This Report

Women are an essential part of global value chains. As raw material producers, small-business owners, executives, retail workers, and consumers, women help businesses succeed and grow. Yet women continue to face barriers to achieve their full potential at work, in the marketplace, and in many other aspects of life. This not only holds women back, it impairs the growth of businesses, economies, and communities. Empowering women in global value chains presents a unique opportunity to create business value and strengthen women's health, rights, and wellbeing.

This report aims to help unlock business opportunities that advance the health, rights, and wellbeing of women in global value chains. It highlights the benefits of investing in women along the value chain and provides a framework for action and practical guidance for companies to identify and strengthen value-chain investment opportunities that deliver positive returns to business, women, and society. This report is not an exhaustive analysis of the ways companies impact women's empowerment, or the way women's empowerment impacts businesses. Rather, it should serve as an inspirational guide to help both new and experienced companies develop effective approaches to women's empowerment. While the report is designed for a diverse industry audience, some examples and recommendations may be more relevant to consumer products companies with a strong manufacturing supply chain than service companies.

This report builds on a number of studies that emphasize the importance of a holistic and integrated approach to women's empowerment, including a recent [report](#) on building effective women's economic empowerment strategies published by BSR and the International Center for Research on Women and commissioned by the Oak Foundation.<sup>1</sup> It also draws on a review of the latest literature on corporate engagement in women's empowerment and a series of interviews with companies to test the framework and gather insights on key gaps, opportunities, and solutions. It also incorporates feedback and perspectives from participants at the private sector pre-conference held prior to the global Women Deliver conference in May 2016. For more information, please contact Indiana Vieljeux ([ivieljeux@bsr.org](mailto:ivieljeux@bsr.org)).

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## DISCLAIMER

The writers of this report maintain a policy of not acting as representatives of the companies mentioned in this report, nor do they endorse specific company policies or standards.

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<sup>1</sup> BSR and ICRW, 2016.

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## Executive Summary

In 2015, world leaders put gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women squarely at the top of international and development agendas. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon by world leaders raised global ambition levels and added fuel to the momentum that has been building over the last decade to achieve major improvements for people and planet, and not least the world's women. This is seen not only as important in its own right, but also as an essential ingredient for eradicating poverty.

The business community has joined the chorus of government and civil society leaders calling for change. More than 1,000 business leaders have signed the Women's Empowerment Principles, committing to empower women in the marketplace, workplace, and community. The UN HeforShe campaign has engaged 10 male CEOs as impact champions to incubate innovation and serve as role models for gender equality, and more companies across industries are setting goals on diversity, equality, and opportunity in boardrooms and on factory floors.

The message is loud and clear: Every sector benefits when women are empowered, and every sector must do its individual and collective part if there is to be any chance of a sustainable future.

In the first years of the new Sustainable Development agenda, there is a need to translate the ambitious goals and business commitments into practical actions and tangible results. This report is intended to be an inspirational and practical guide for companies to capture opportunities to promote gender equality and accelerate women's empowerment in global value chains through a holistic, integrated, and strategic approach. It includes a series of case studies and practical examples showcasing how companies apply the concepts and recommendations in diverse contexts.

## Business Benefits of Investing in Women's Empowerment

For most companies, their starting point for investing in women's empowerment is a fundamental commitment to gender equality. Women's rights are human rights; not only do companies have an obligation to respect those rights, but that respect also aligns with core company and individual values.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are also essential to building healthy and resilient businesses. Holding back half the population from achieving their full potential at work and in other aspects of life does not make good business sense. When women do not have access to family planning, lack proper prenatal care, or suffer from intimate partner violence, this results in lost productivity and high rates of absenteeism or turnover, all of which affect companies. When laws restrict women's access to financial services, the market misses out on new entrepreneurs and companies lose out on potential new consumer markets. When women face barriers to professional advancement, companies limit opportunities for product and process innovation. Unequal opportunities for women can also affect company reputations with employees and consumers, with consequences for efficiency and growth. This report describes the three business benefits of empowering women as cost savings and productivity, innovation, and market growth.

## Key Principles

To be effective at both advancing the health, rights, and wellbeing of women and also generating benefits for business, companies need to develop an approach grounded in three key principles: holistic, integrated, and strategic.

» **A holistic approach** means that companies look at the full scope of economic, social, cultural, and political factors that affect women's access to information, opportunities, and agency. It also means looking at the range of actors, including male figures, who impact women directly and indirectly through their influence on community perceptions and societal expectations of women.

» **An integrated approach** requires embedding gender considerations throughout company functions, processes, policies, values, and relationships across the company value chain. It also means that opportunities for women's empowerment are not housed in isolated silos of different departments. Rather, they are considered in different decisions along the value chain, prioritized by company leadership, and reiterated in company values and mission statements.

» **A strategic approach** takes into account feasibility, business drivers, and long-term investment, as well as a company's own competitive advantages based on its expertise, resources, tools, and networks. It seeks to prioritize issues that, from the company's perspective, have the greatest potential to improve opportunities for women to contribute to the value chain. A strategic approach also recognizes that there are times when companies cannot and should not be leading efforts to advance women's empowerment on their own.

## Framework for Action

Based on these key principles, there are many different ways companies can drive change. Every company can take action in areas under its direct control to benefit women in its own operations and throughout the value chain. They can also enable and influence other companies, partners, individuals, and policymakers by incentivizing, partnering, and communicating with others in their industries and supply chains—thereby influencing the broader market. This report presents a framework for action that recognizes the different levers and roles companies play in gender equality and women's empowerment: act, enable, and influence.

» **Act:** Taking action within a company's direct control is an essential starting point for promoting women's empowerment. This includes adjusting company policies, practices, and investments that impact women along the value chain.

» **Enable:** Investing and partnering to enable NGOs, community organizations, and business partners to promote women's empowerment along the value chain is another component of effective business action. This could include investments in women's funds or NGOs, collaboration with other businesses to advance women's empowerment, and the creation of products and services that allow other actors to support women's health, rights, and wellbeing.

» **Influence:** Engaging in research, advocacy, and communications campaigns to build an environment that promotes gender equality and opportunities for women is the third component of effective women's empowerment approaches. This can include company dialogues with policymakers on changes to health and safety standards or minimum wage laws that affect women workers, as well as the use of marketing



and engagement with customers and the general public to promote greater investment in and awareness of key issues facing women.

## Guidance for Business

This report aims to help translate the principles and framework for action into an effective agenda for an individual company through four steps: Establish the business case, set priorities, identify opportunities for action, and integrate and implement.

- 1. Establish the business case:** Companies need to understand why women's empowerment is important for their mission, activities, value chains, and stakeholders. This includes understanding how the company impacts women along the value chain and how women's contributions drive business value. It also includes understanding the socioeconomic context that drives business action and affects women's ability to achieve their full potential.
- 2. Set priorities:** Companies should prioritize issues that have the greatest potential to improve opportunities for women to contribute to the value chain, given the company's sector, geographies, and operations. Companies can adapt their strategic materiality analysis approach to incorporate the importance and relevance to business of key women's empowerment issues, as well as the scale, severity, and likelihood of issues affecting women in the value chain.
- 3. Identify opportunities for action:** Once companies have identified areas of high and low importance, they can develop a strategic plan for action. This means identifying areas where the company can act, enable, and/or influence.
- 4. Integrate and implement:** Implementing the opportunities for action requires a supportive governance structure, culture, and measurement systems within the company. This can be accomplished by creating a culture of inclusion, aspirational goals, realistic targets, and clear accountabilities, as well as the measurement and reporting of meaningful gender-disaggregated data and outcomes.

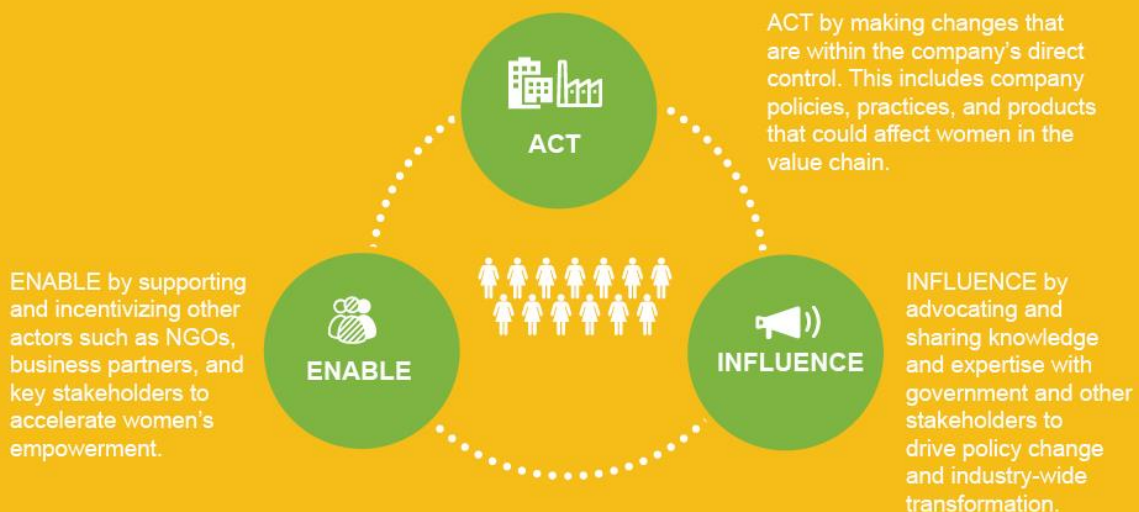
These steps are not intended to be a prescriptive set of recommendations; but rather to assist companies with practical guidance, best practices, sample tools, and questions to provoke dialogue and action inside companies.

Collaboration is essential to mobilizing the resources and catalyzing the solutions needed to achieve major change in our lifetime. Fortunately, more decision-makers in public and private spheres see the value in bringing diverse voices and interests together. Women Deliver's Deliver for Good campaign aims to engage different sectors to promote 12 investments in girls and women that will have positive ripple effects on social, political, and economic progress for all. BSR and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs have launched a new collaboration to drive industry-wide change in a number of global industry supply chains, and create a global company platform to support greater awareness as well as practical tools to catalyze and scale action in a number of key countries.

## Key Principles



## Framework for Action



## Guidance for Business



# Introduction

Achieving gender equality and empowering girls and women is a global health, development, and business imperative. Every country and every sector benefits when women are healthy, educated, empowered, and can participate fully and equally in all aspects of life. Business is no exception.

No company can get ahead if half of the population is left behind. If women participated in the economy equally to men, it would add as much as US\$28 trillion to the annual global GDP, according to the McKinsey Global Institute<sup>2</sup>—equal to the combined GDP of the world's two largest economies, the United States and China. More studies demonstrate the powerful multiplier effect of women's empowerment on families, communities, and economies. Greater control over household income by women increases investments in children's health and education, with positive effects on economic growth.<sup>3</sup>

Research confirms that companies that are committed to gender equality outperform peers. A recent study of 21,980 global, publicly traded companies in 91 countries found that having women occupy at least 30 percent of leadership positions adds 6 percent to net profit margin.<sup>4</sup> Another study by McKinsey found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians.<sup>5</sup>

Although the business and societal benefits of promoting women's empowerment are increasingly clear, women remain far from equal at work and in many aspects of life. Women earn less, own less, and have more limited access to essential products and services. They also face a range of barriers—from laws that prevent them from opening bank accounts and owning property to social norms that prevent them from attending school and push them into lower-paying, less secure jobs. For instance, more than 70 percent of women in non-agricultural jobs are engaged in informal employment in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>6</sup>

Around the world, women also do a disproportionate amount of unpaid work—on average, almost two and a half times as much as men.<sup>7</sup> This causes many women to pursue part-time or informal work that can be combined with these unpaid responsibilities. This work is often undervalued and overlooked by

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<sup>2</sup> Woetzel et al., 2015.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Noland, Moran, and Kotschwar, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Hunt, Layton, and Prince, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Vanek et al., 2014.

<sup>7</sup> World Bank, 2012.



governments, even though it is estimated that unpaid work could contribute up to 50 percent of GDP if it were assigned a monetary value.<sup>8</sup>

More business and government leaders recognize the urgent need to bring about major improvements for the world's women. The recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) raised global ambition levels to achieve gender equality, and more business leaders have made bold commitments on diversity, equality, and opportunity in boardrooms and on factory floors.<sup>9</sup>

### Building Blocks

Companies develop a holistic approach to women's empowerment by focusing on the full range of systemic and structural factors that hinder women's progress.



It is now widely accepted that achieving these ambitious agendas will require more than a series of siloed investments. Rather, they require a holistic, integrated, and strategic approach that focuses on the underlying factors holding girls and women back—one that is embedded in the way companies do business and their longer-term value systems. This approach is rooted in eight building blocks that seek to drive improvements in women's economic opportunity and equality at work, in health and wellbeing, and through their voice and participation.<sup>10</sup> This approach is also intimately tied to the way companies directly and indirectly impact women across the entire value chain, from the upstream design and manufacture of products and sourcing of raw materials to downstream activities including the marketing, distribution, and use of products and services by the consumer.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are mutually reinforcing goals. Gender equality—including equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities—is a necessary foundation for empowerment. As explained by the United Nations Millennium Project Taskforce on Gender Equality, the core of

<sup>8</sup> UN Women, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> UN Women, HeforShe campaign.

<sup>10</sup> These eight building blocks were developed by the International Center for Research on Women and Dalberg Global Development Advisors and have been endorsed by BSR, the Dutch Foreign Ministry, and the Win-Win Coalition.

empowerment lies in a woman's ability to control her own destiny. This means that it is not enough for women to have equal capabilities and access to resources; "they must also have the agency to use those rights, capabilities, resources, and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions."<sup>11</sup>

## Report Objectives and Structure

This report aims to help companies translate the ambitious development agenda and business commitments into practical actions and tangible results. In particular, it provides an inspirational and practical guide to capture opportunities to accelerate women's empowerment in global value chains through a holistic, integrated, and strategic approach.

It supports Women Deliver's Deliver for Good campaign that seeks to rally multisector allies, influence the narrative about girls and women and SDGs implementation, and fuel concrete political and practical action at the global and country levels. (See [www.DeliverforGood.org](http://www.DeliverforGood.org) for more information about the 12 Deliver for Good investments.)

The report is divided into three core sections:

**Key Principles:** Business' contribution to women's empowerment is most effective when it is holistic, integrated, and strategic; grounded in a solid business case; and when it recognizes business' human rights obligations and is embedded into corporate values. This section explains these core principles.

**Framework for Action:** Companies can drive change in many ways, through individual actions focused on areas within their direct control, or by enabling and influencing actors in their value chains and wider society. This section presents a framework for action that includes three elements: act, enable, and influence.

**Guidance for Business:** Translating the principles and framework into an actionable agenda for an individual company requires a systematic approach to prioritization and implementation. This section outlines four steps companies can use to implement the framework.

"In Practice" examples are used throughout the report to showcase how the concepts and recommendations have been applied in diverse company contexts. In addition, there are four longer case studies of companies employing innovative approaches to women's empowerment in their value chains.

## Business Benefits of Investing in Women's Empowerment

Women are present in every part of global value chains—as producers and business owners, executives and employees, distributors, and consumers. With globalization and advances in communications technologies, value chains have helped unlock opportunities for women around the world to participate more fully in formal labor markets and access products and services to improve their wellbeing.

Yet the reality is that value chains have also left the journey to gender equality unfinished. Women make up half the world's population, but their access to education, healthcare, and opportunities are far from equal.

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<sup>11</sup> UN Millennium Project, 2005.

Women represent a significant portion of workers in many supply chains, but they often occupy some of the lowest-paid and most vulnerable jobs. For example, women represent around 80 percent of Vietnam's 700,000 light manufacturing workers, but they tend to be in lower-paid positions as seamstresses and helpers, while men are in higher-paid occupations such as cutters and mechanics. Women also tend to work longer hours than men and are less likely to be promoted or receive training.<sup>12</sup> In healthcare, up to 75 percent of health workers in some countries are women, but doctors and upper management are most often men.<sup>13</sup>

Women also make most of the household health decisions, yet they lack access to basic medicines and high-quality sexual and reproductive health services. More than 800 women die from childbirth every day from preventable causes including massive bleeding, high blood pressure, infections, unsafe abortions, and complications during delivery.<sup>14</sup> Many of the more than 225 million women who want to avoid pregnancy are not using safe and effective family-planning methods because they lack support from partners or communities or access to information and services.<sup>15</sup>

Long gone are the days when companies focused solely on the actions and impacts within the four walls of their headquarters or operations. Today, companies have both a responsibility and an incentive to address social and environmental issues along their value chains and increasingly aligning their corporate values with social missions and sense of purpose.

For many companies a key driver for investing in women's empowerment is the fundamental belief that every employee, supply chain worker, and customer should be treated with respect and able to achieve their potential. Women's rights are human rights, and companies have an obligation to respect these in their operations and throughout their value chains. In most cases, though, the drivers go far beyond mitigating risks. Many companies believe that women's empowerment is essential to fulfilling core company and individual values.

Women's empowerment is also a business opportunity. Empowering women in the value chain presents an incredible opportunity not only to improve the lives of people making, selling, and buying products, but also to ensure more stable and efficient supply chains, draw on a diverse pool of talent, and reach new consumer segments—all of which impact financial performance and long-term business resilience. There are three key business benefits of investing in women's empowerment: cost savings and productivity, innovation, and market growth.

## **COST SAVINGS AND PRODUCTIVITY**

Women's empowerment is essential to a well-functioning value chain. The resilience of global supply chains is intricately linked with the status of women on farms and in factories that manufacture and develop products. In many industries, including agriculture, healthcare, apparel, and toys, women make up a majority of the workers.<sup>16</sup> Yet when women's health, wellbeing, and access to opportunities are compromised, companies lose out on their contributions to productivity and efficiency. For example, if female farmers had the same access as men to resources such as fertilizer and farm equipment, their

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<sup>12</sup> Fontana and Silberman, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> WHO, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> WHO, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Guttmacher Institute, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Pruzan-Jorgensen, 2016.

productivity could increase by 20 to 30 percent.<sup>17</sup> This represents a significant increase in potential income for women and positively impacts the quality and quantity of supply.

BSR's HERproject, a workplace-based women's empowerment program, found that investments in improving women's health knowledge and access to goods and services can provide a 4:1 return on investment through cost savings from reduced absenteeism and staff turnover.<sup>18</sup> Similar benefits can be seen when improving wages, benefits, and work schedules for women—particularly for working mothers in retail operations in the United States. Women assume the majority of unpaid work and family caregiving responsibilities, and it is difficult to juggle care for children or ill family members with erratic schedules and low wages. This impacts the ability for women and their families to escape poverty and directly affects worker productivity, engagement, and absenteeism.<sup>19</sup>

Investments focused on equipping women with the skills and confidence to succeed and lead offer significant payoffs to companies. Although women make up less than 5 percent of CEOs of the Standard & Poor's 500, studies show that companies with female leaders tend to perform better financially.<sup>20</sup> The benefits of gender diversity are not exclusive to senior-level leadership. Walmart's Women in Factories program in China, which offers both work and life-skills training to factory workers, has shown improvements in communications between workers and supervisors and improvements in business competitiveness. More than 70 percent of the 26,000 workers who participated in the training say that it helped them solve problems in their personal lives and at work, and it helped them adapt to factory work.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, ignoring gender gaps and inequities can leave companies exposed to production and delivery disruptions, bottlenecks, and inefficiencies. More studies demonstrate the economic costs of intimate partner violence due to absenteeism and productivity. In Bangladesh, where rates of intimate partner violence are higher than 30 percent, productivity loss costs the economy US\$262 million, or 1.28 percent of the GDP.<sup>22</sup> Women's unequal status in many societies also means that women suffer disproportionately from natural disasters, which could have ripple effects on companies' sources of supply.<sup>23</sup> In Pakistan, 74 percent of working women 15 years and over are employed in agriculture.<sup>24</sup> Poor resilience in the face of major floods in 2010 and 2011 had devastating effects on cotton production, causing prices for cotton to rise sharply.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> FAO, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Chowdhury, Wofford, and Dupont, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Traub, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Fairchild, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> BSR, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Meiers, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Girl Effect Team, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> World Bank data portal.

<sup>25</sup> Thorpe and Fennel, 2012.

**IN PRACTICE****BUSINESS BENEFIT: COST SAVINGS AND PRODUCTIVITY****Gap Inc.**

Gap Inc. initiated the P.A.C.E. (Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement) workplace education program to teach women managerial, interpersonal, and other practical skills needed to advance at work and in society. The program is a natural fit for a company where women make up 74 percent of its employees and 70 percent of its senior leadership team. In addition to creating a workforce with more skills, P.A.C.E. improves the productivity and performance of the company's suppliers and reinforces the company's values and purpose with employees.<sup>26</sup> A study of the program by the International Center for Research on Women found greater work efficacy among participants, such as the ability to take initiative and demonstrate their abilities, as well as greater influence in the workplace through stronger relationships, effective communication, and other skills. Supplier research on how P.A.C.E. impacts their business found lower absenteeism, increased efficiency, and higher productivity. In Cambodia, for example, retention rates were 66 percent higher for P.A.C.E. participants than other workers. At a factory in India, productivity was 15 percent higher for P.A.C.E. participants.<sup>27</sup>

**INNOVATION**

Women's empowerment also goes hand-in-hand with the diversity and inclusion that are essential for business product and process innovation. When women can speak freely and openly in all contexts, they bring forward new ideas and contribute to problem-solving, especially when faced with diverse stakeholder needs. This finding is supported by studies that show gender-diverse boards improve financial performance for organizations where innovation and creativity are critically important.<sup>28</sup>

Innovation is not only the result of diverse teams, but also the best talent. When women workers or business owners are consistently placed at a disadvantage for opportunities, companies narrow the talent pool. With many industries facing talent shortages, addressing the needs and barriers facing women along companies' value chains will be a key differentiator in the marketplace. Although women now make up the majority of university graduates, it is getting more difficult to attract and retain women in certain professions. This is due to a range of reasons, including limited parental leave policies, concerns about health and safety, lack of mentorship, and actual and perceived barriers to advancement.<sup>29</sup> Women leave the tech industry at double the rate of men, and more than half leave before they reach mid-level management.<sup>30</sup> It does not come as much of a surprise that the proportion of women in technical roles has stubbornly remained at 21 percent for the past five years.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gap Inc., 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Nanda, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Chen, Leung, and Evans, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Gammal and Simard, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Leahy, 2015.



While the links between women's empowerment and innovation are traditionally considered in relation to direct employees at all levels in a company, there is growing evidence that greater engagement of female business owners is essential for innovation. Promoting opportunities for women to create and grow businesses supports supplier diversification and enables companies to tap the "best in class" suppliers. This is particularly true in the case of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), 10 million of which have full or partial female ownership, representing more than 30 percent of registered SMEs in emerging markets.<sup>32</sup> These companies tend to be more agile and may operate in niche markets, allowing them to deliver a service that cannot be matched by large providers.<sup>33</sup>

## MARKET GROWTH

Investing in women also unlocks new market opportunities by increasing access to goods and services for women at different ends of the income spectrum. Women create and control an increasing share of wealth in many parts of the world, making them an important investor group and powerful consumer demographic. Globally, it is estimated that women already control more than US\$20 trillion in spending and make upwards of 80 percent of household purchasing decisions worldwide.<sup>34</sup>

At the same time, there are many missed opportunities to expand markets for essential goods and services for low-income women. Women have only 84 percent of the access of men to the internet and mobile phones.<sup>35</sup> Reducing the gender digital divide by connecting another 600 million women to the internet could unlock a market opportunity of between US\$50 billion and US\$70 billion in new sales of platforms and data plans. It could also contribute an estimated US\$13 billion to US\$18 billion annually to developing countries' GDPs.<sup>36</sup>

Women are also a large and growing market for financial products and services. Women own more than 30 percent of registered businesses worldwide,<sup>37</sup> but only 47 percent of women have an account at a formal financial institution, compared with 55 percent of men.<sup>38</sup> In emerging markets, women-owned SMEs have unmet financial needs of an estimated US\$300 billion every year.<sup>39</sup> Access to financial services such as credit, savings, and insurance are considered one of the major barriers to growth for women-owned businesses.<sup>40</sup> A lack of financial education, as well as laws that restrict women from opening a bank account, such as requirements for a male family member's permission, all play a role.<sup>41</sup>

Capturing these opportunities will require understanding the needs of women and addressing critical barriers to access, such as unsupportive laws and policies. Studies show that women report a lack of products and services that meet their needs, as well as marketing and communications that patronize rather than inspire confidence.<sup>42</sup> A Boston Consulting Group survey of 12,000 women in 21 countries

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<sup>32</sup> IFC and Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Sodexo Supplier Inclusion Program.

<sup>34</sup> Silverstein and Sayre, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Woetzel et al., 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Intel Corporation, Dalberg Global Development Advisors, and World Pulse, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> World Bank, 2014.

<sup>38</sup> World Bank, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> International Finance Corporation, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> World Bank, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Silverstein and Sayre, 2009.

found that 73 percent of women were dissatisfied by financial services and 71 percent were dissatisfied with their financial provider's product offering. In insurance, those figures were 75 percent and 74 percent, respectively.<sup>43</sup> Many of these women felt that gender was a key factor contributing to the way they were treated.

Companies that are best positioned to capture these opportunities have workforces that are more reflective of and responsive to their customer base.<sup>44</sup> They engage women in the design, development, and sale of products and services so that they are "by women, for women." They consider gender in product design, and see gender-sensitive sales, marketing, and distribution as drivers for customer loyalty, brand reputation, and growth.

#### IN PRACTICE

#### BUSINESS BENEFIT: MARKET GROWTH

##### Vodafone

Around 300 million fewer women than men own a mobile phone.<sup>45</sup> Vodafone estimates that 91 million of these women live in markets where the company operates, which represents a substantial unfulfilled market, a window for business, and incredible potential to improve the lives of women, their children, and communities. To capture this opportunity, the company is using its mobile technology and services to help connect women to education and skills training, job opportunities, and health services. In 2013, Vodafone Turkey launched the Vodafone Women First program, which helps women use mobile technology, access information, acquire new skills, and increase their incomes. The Women First Advertisement Service, a key part of the program, enables women with little experience with mobile technology to sell their handicrafts on one of Turkey's biggest online marketplaces. The service also provides promotional offers and information services on topics such as child health and wellbeing. In its first nine months, the program attracted 75,000 women customers, 15 percent of whom were new customers for Vodafone.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Silverstein, Kato, and Tischhauer, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Pax World Investments, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Vital Wave Consulting, GSMA Fund, and the Cherie Blair Foundation, 2013.

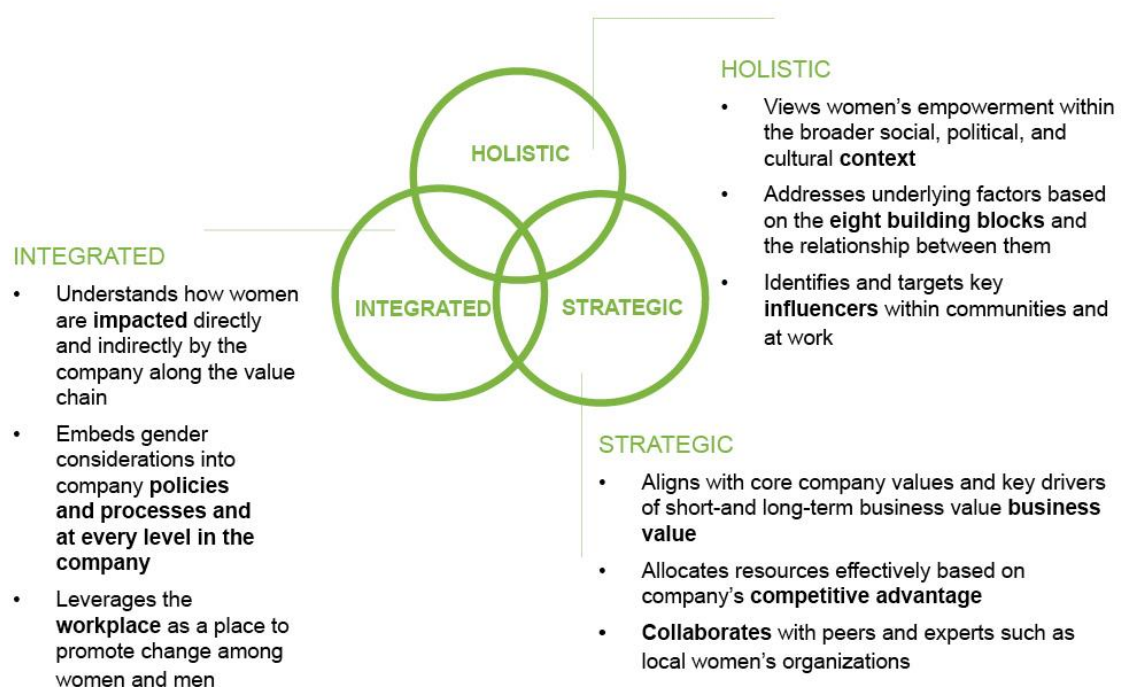
<sup>46</sup> Vodafone, 2014.

## Key Principles: Holistic, Integrated, and Strategic

Tapping the full potential of value chains to advance the health, rights, and wellbeing of women—and to drive business benefits—requires a holistic, integrated, and strategic approach. This means understanding the underlying systemic factors that serve as barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment along the value chain and aligning the approach closely to a company's own value drivers and capabilities.

This is not about companies addressing every dimension of women's empowerment in every part of the value chain. However, the fact is that many well-intentioned efforts to advance women's empowerment fail to acknowledge the broader context that women live in, and how every part of their business affects women. This can lead companies to miss opportunities or risks that can impact successful interventions.

In this section, we describe the three principles of holistic, integrated, and strategic in more detail. The graphic below provides a snapshot of these principles and recommendations for applying them to promote women's empowerment in global value chains.



## Holistic

Women in the workplace face complex challenges that cannot be addressed by one set of solutions. Rather, they require attention to a range of economic, social, and political factors that affect women's access to information, opportunities, and agency. A holistic approach understands all of the building blocks and how they interact to strengthen women's empowerment. For example, lower-skilled work in garment factories has offered a route out of poverty for many women, but many women face new challenges, such as increased risks of violence and harassment from superiors or male family members who feel threatened by their independence.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, lack of access to women's reproductive healthcare and contraception may not only be the result of physical barriers to access, but also due to limited awareness and education alongside policies or practices that restrict women's access to family planning.<sup>48</sup> This affects a woman's ability to achieve her potential at work due to increased absenteeism and childcare demands, among other factors that affect productivity and retention.

For companies to advance women's empowerment along the value chain, they must develop and respond to a more holistic picture of the barriers to and opportunities for women's progress at every level of the company. Without doing so, companies could find that investments in strengthening women's skills, for example, achieve limited success if they are not coupled with efforts to remove restrictions on women's ability to own property or access critical inputs like fertilizer. Companies may find that their efforts to provide a platform for women to express their views and shape debate could easily be undermined by women's increased risk of violence, harassment, or abuse. Companies could find that their commitments to integrate more women into the supply chain will never produce results if women lack basic education and access to health services.

Holistic also means looking at the full scope of actors influencing women's empowerment. It is about understanding how important support from male figures, such as fathers and husbands, is to women's ability to attend school or go to work freely. It is also about understanding how community perceptions shape women's sense of self-worth and interest in or fears about working outside the home. It is also about understanding how the time and effort of fetching water and wood or caring for children and ill relatives impacts women at work. It is also about looking at ways in which women cultivate leadership, a sense of agency, and decision-making skills earlier in life through activities such as girls' participation in sports and community programs. A holistic approach demands a conscious effort to understand and address the norms, behaviors, and laws that help or hinder women's empowerment.

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<sup>47</sup> Fair Wear Foundation, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> United Nations Population Fund, 2016.

## CASE STUDY

**Vestergaard: Value Chain Innovations for Healthier and Empowered Women**

Vestergaard is a family-owned global health company dedicated to providing innovative solutions that contribute to a healthier, more sustainable planet. Vestergaard's model is based on the conviction that doing good is good business. Accordingly, the company devotes its entire innovation platform to producing breakthrough products and solutions that improve the lives of vulnerable people, most of whom live in developing countries.

For more than two decades, the company has helped more than 1 billion people through a focus on health products like PermaNet® long-lasting insecticidal bed nets that prevent malaria, and LifeStraw® water filters that prevent waterborne diseases by converting contaminated water into clean, safe drinking water. The company has just launched a new food-security business, using its expertise in vector control to develop products that improve livestock productivity and reduce post-harvest loss.

The company considers gender dynamics and women's empowerment in all of its work, in light of the important role women play in family health decisions and the multiplier effect that improved opportunities for women have on family wellbeing and sustainable development. What follows are three ways Vestergaard is translating the principles into action:

**Holistic:** Vestergaard learned early on that safe drinking water is not just an end in itself, but also a means to improve health, wellbeing, and economic opportunities. Access to safe water helps prevent diarrhea and other water-related diseases, enabling women to participate more fully in economic activity. It also has indirect effects, enabling girls to attend school by reducing the amount of time they spend fetching water or taking care of sick family members. Clean water is also essential for protecting maternal and newborn health and, in turn, supporting future generations. The company has learned that the provision of its CarePack® of health interventions, including a LifeStraw® Family water purifier and a PermaNet® bed net, distributed through maternal health clinics, not only helps reduce under-5 child mortality and maternal mortality, it serves as an incentive for mothers to attend prenatal care and deliver in health facilities. More than one in 10 deaths among children under 5—around 1 million deaths every year—is due to diarrhea. Mothers and children are at high risk, particularly in the first days after childbirth. Taking a holistic approach that addresses the interconnected and systemic nature of challenges facing women helps the company develop effective solutions.

**Integrated:** Engaging women at every stage of the value chain is an important part of ensuring that products and their delivery methods meet the needs of women as end-users and translate health interventions into health impact. This means seeking women's leadership in overall business strategy, concept development, product design, manufacturing, program design, and program implementation. For example, women play an important role in managing safe water and sanitation programs in schools in Kenya. Vestergaard is also tapping socially conscious consumers, many of whom are women, to help finance the provision of clean water products in developing countries. Gender dynamics and women's empowerment are integrated in how the company makes decisions at every stage of the value chain.

**Strategic:** Women make up a significant portion of the world's poor, so improving women's wellbeing helps Vestergaard fulfill its mission as a purpose-driven company. The company is currently undergoing a strategy-development process to align its business objectives with the SDGs. This allows Vestergaard to accelerate successful programs and identify other areas of opportunity, including advancing environmental sustainability. This process of prioritization helps the company align its areas of expertise around health, water, and food-security innovations; product development; and program implementation with national and global development agendas.

Source: Vestergaard, <http://www.vestergaard.com/>. CarePack® for Maternal and Infant Health, <http://www.vestergaard.com/component/zoo/item/maternal-health>. Interview with Vestergaard CEO Mikkel Vestergaard and Alison Hill, Managing Director of Vestergaard's water business.



## Integrated

An effective approach also requires embedding gender considerations throughout company functions, processes, corporate values, and relationships across the value chain. This means, for example, ensuring women's empowerment is a part of procurement and sourcing decisions, R&D protocols, brand strategies, and contracts with new distribution partners. It requires companies to incorporate women's empowerment into community investment decisions as well as its own policies and practices to advance women's empowerment along the value chain.

Integration also means that the opportunities for women's empowerment are not just viewed in isolated silos of different departments, but considered in different decisions along the value chain. This could include how downstream decisions on distribution and sales affect women in production, or how women's participation in R&D affects female consumers. For example, including women in clinical trials ensures that any harmful effects of medicine on women are taken into account during development stages. Developing products and services tailored to women's needs demands more than simply labeling products specifically for women. It requires training retail staff to be sensitive to women's needs, or even redesigning retail outlets so that women feel safe and comfortable accessing products and services. Such an approach that would look at expanding access to products for women can also create new economic opportunities for women entrepreneurs in retail channels.

Such an approach also acknowledges that workplaces present opportunities to establish new approaches to advance women's empowerment. As protected environments, workplaces can help shift norms and behaviors, enable mentorship, provide education and economic opportunities, and strengthen relationships with stakeholders. They can help break down barriers for women to participate more fully in work and bring these lessons home to children and their communities.

### IN PRACTICE

### KEY PRINCIPLES

#### Unilever

By 2020, Unilever aims to empower 5 million women by strengthening women's rights, skills, and opportunities across the value chain. To achieve this goal, the company stresses the importance of integrating women's economic empowerment throughout its brands. With women representing more than 70 percent of its customers, Unilever's brands can help drive and amplify company messages and develop solutions based on the needs and issues relevant to their respective value chains and consumer segments.<sup>49</sup> Unilever's Sunlight brand is partnering with Oxfam and TechnoServe to develop Water Centers run by women entrepreneurs in Nigeria, which provide communities in rural villages with a sustainable supply of clean water for domestic tasks. This frees up women's time to focus on things other than collecting water. Unilever's Dove brand created the Dove Self-Esteem project more than 10 years ago to challenge beauty stereotypes and help women view beauty as a source of confidence, not anxiety. Since 2004, Dove has engaged women in a discussion about beauty, employed various communications vehicles, including school workshops, to challenge beauty stereotypes, and created self-esteem-building educational programs.<sup>50</sup> Critically important to the brands' success is that gender diversity inside Unilever reflects its diverse consumer profile. The company is on its way to achieving 50-50 gender balance throughout the company by 2020.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> BSR interview with senior manager at Unilever.

<sup>50</sup> Unilever, 2015.

<sup>51</sup> UN Women, 2016.

## Strategic

Companies also must prioritize investments and activities. An effective approach takes into account feasibility, the business drivers highlighted above, and a company's own competitive advantages based on its expertise, resources, tools, and networks. This is why a company that wants to strengthen supply-chain resilience will prioritize its investment in geographies or with suppliers where it can have the greatest impact on both the business and women.

This may also require a long-term view on investment returns. For example, this could mean investments that strengthen the basic infrastructure or health system so that women can access resources for generations to come. Other investments that focus on improving education and other opportunities for children, particularly girls, also have a longer-term investment horizon but could lead to significant payoffs for companies in terms of building a skilled talent pool.

A strategic approach also recognizes that there are some cases in which companies cannot and should not be leading efforts to advance women's empowerment on their own. Just as companies talk about the problems they can solve, they should acknowledge what they cannot do and the limits they face in certain contexts. For example, there are times where companies will provide more benefits by scaling up and commercializing existing solutions rather than developing new solutions themselves. In some cases, communities will be more receptive to health information received from peers than from companies or health institutions. A key ingredient to building a strategic approach is determining the role a company should take in advancing its priorities; sometimes it is more effective to enable or influence others to act.

## CASE STUDY

**KappAhl: Expanding Opportunities for Low-Income Women in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is one of the most important sourcing countries for KappAhl, a Swedish fashion company with more than 400 stores in Europe. The company has worked for many years to implement and enforce a supply chain code of conduct to improve working conditions for thousands of workers, the majority of whom are women. However, for the company to create a truly resilient supply chain, it needs to address the wider societal challenges women face in Bangladesh. For many poor households in the country, the birth of a girl is considered a misfortune, and throughout their lives, girls are given less food and schooling and have limited voice in decisions that affect them. This impacts their wellbeing and impedes their ability to pursue formal wage employment.

In 2012, KappAhl worked in partnership with TCM, a local development NGO, to open a training center in the township of Tongi to provide economic opportunities in global value chains for poor women in the community. The program selects women ages 18 to 25 from poor households to participate in a three-month training program that includes basic education, including writing, reading, and arithmetic, as well as technical skills such as sewing. They also gain knowledge on health and nutrition and access to medical treatment. The women are paid during the program and are guaranteed a job at one of KappAhl's suppliers. The program has trained 500 women, who have gone on to work in factories, many of whom are earning a living for the first time and gaining independence. Some of the women have also been promoted. One of the unexpected benefits has been the creation of a social network for women to support each other both inside and outside of work.

One key ingredient to the program's success has been the engagement of family members and communities. Many fathers and husbands did not want female household members to work outside the home. This belief stemmed from both cultural norms as well as fears about safety traveling to the training center and factory. In addition, communities expressed concern about working in garment factories after the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013. To address this, the NGO created culturally sensitive awareness campaigns in communities and visited families in person to build trust. This in-person engagement proved important to gaining the support of family members.

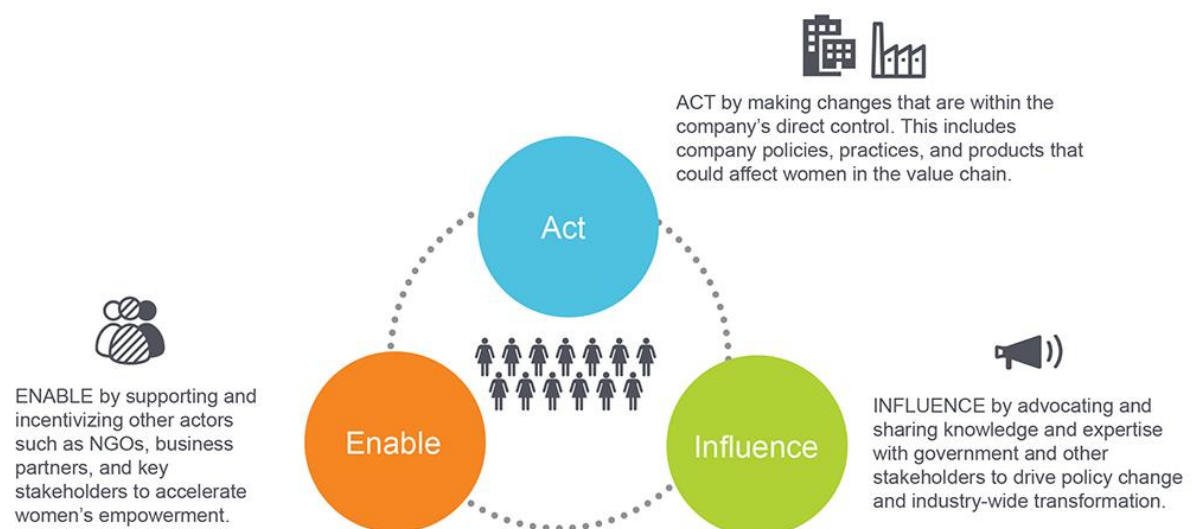
The program has helped strengthen the pipeline for talent in the supply chain, especially as the company expects to do more business in Bangladesh. It has also strengthened relationships with a key supplier at a time when the company is focused on building more meaningful relationships with a smaller number of suppliers. As an added benefit, the program has helped the company communicate to its employees and customers about what it stands for and how it fulfills its values.

Source: KappAhl Sustainability Report. <http://www.kappahl.com/en-US/about-kappahl/sustainability/social-responsibility/for-the-women/>. Interview with Eva Kindgren de Boer, Sustainability Manager, KappAhl.

## Framework for Action: Act, Enable, and Influence

Just as there is no single solution to women's empowerment, there is no single strategy that all companies can employ. However, every company can act in areas where it has direct control to benefit women in its own operations and throughout the value chain. They can also enable and influence others to drive change by incentivizing, partnering, and communicating with others.

The following framework for action includes three ways companies can drive change; it builds on an approach to corporate leadership on women's economic empowerment developed by the Harvard Kennedy School and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.<sup>52</sup> We modified the approach to highlight how business action is predicated on their spheres of influence and control. This is particularly important considering the complex nature of global value chains, which are made up of thousands of partners and stakeholders upstream and downstream spread across dozens or hundreds of countries.<sup>53</sup> Put simply, companies can act, enable, and influence. This framework recognizes that companies have different levers for change, and a holistic, integrated, and strategic approach depends upon partnerships with a wide range of actors.



<sup>53</sup> The approach developed by Harvard and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce used “engage” rather than “act” to refer to direct engagement with women.

## CASE STUDY

**Royal Dutch Philips: Improving Women's Health in Africa**

Philips has been operating in Africa for more than 100 years. Its history provides unique insight on the complexities of working in diverse healthcare environments and the pressing needs facing women. The company recognizes that women's health and wellbeing are essential to ensure families and communities thrive and Philips succeeds in the region.

In 2013, Philips decided to bolster its investment in addressing noncommunicable diseases and maternal health in Africa through a focus on transforming the quality of care. To do so, the company reflected on its key competitive advantages, including its expertise as a health technology company, its approach to partnership, and its relationships with key stakeholders. Philips built a strategy around three key priorities: transforming the healthcare infrastructure, developing innovative technology solutions, and building and sustaining human capacity. The approach is people-centric, which is in contrast to how healthcare systems have been traditionally designed, with a focus on hospitals and doctors, largely men. Philips is applying each aspect of the Act-Enable-Influence framework to help improve the health and wellbeing of 500 million women in Africa.

**Act:** The company is helping make access to basic healthcare more affordable and accessible through its own activities. In 2014, it developed the Community Life Center in Kenya, an integrated solution for primary healthcare and community development. Applying the company's health and lighting expertise, the center provides access to healthcare with a focus on maternal and infant health, while enabling social, educational, and commercial activities after dusk and improving the safety and security of the neighborhood. At the center, community members can buy clean water and sustainable products like Philips' smokeless cook stoves and home solar lighting products, while also benefiting from Philips solar-powered LED outdoor lighting. Philips trains staff and tailors the design to the needs of the community. Philips is also developing new products for resource-constrained settings, including a digital colposcope, a hand-held ultrasound to allow prenatal care in rural communities, and a cervical cancer screening procedure using reliable video and imaging processing to make screening easier for less-experienced clinicians to use and interpret clinical findings.

**Enable:** Philips Foundation is working with UNICEF, local organizations and the Kenyan government on the Maternal and Newborn Health Innovations Project. The project aims to catalyze and scale up innovative, low-cost, and locally designed healthcare devices for women, newborns, and children in places with limited medical resources. The project is financed by the foundation and uses the local expertise of Philips Research Africa to mentor social entrepreneurs and facilitate the transfer of healthcare technology know-how. Philips also identifies a select number of promising interventions and helps commercialize them. One example is an automated respiratory monitor, created to support the diagnosis of pneumonia in children under 5. The foundation is also working in the Ivory Coast with the Netherlands Red Cross, the Ivory Coast Red Cross, and the local Ministry of Health. The project is focusing on innovation in community resilience, using the expertise of the Philips African Innovation Hub and Philips Design. The project aims to improve mother and child healthcare locally through better-equipped health facilities that are more frequently used. In the longer term, the program aims to strengthen community resilience in the Bloléquin region.

**Influence:** The company is also advancing research into women's needs to help Philips develop innovative solutions tailored to local needs and contribute to building the evidence base for key barriers to progress and solutions. Most recently, Philips Africa Innovation Hub, supported by research agency Dr. Monk, conducted an investigation of the barriers to breastfeeding that urban mothers in Africa face when they return to work, including limited early initiation of breastfeeding, unsupportive work environments, limited access to breast milk expression facilities and storage, and cultural norms. From these insights, Philips and partners are able to develop innovations to enable mothers to continue breastfeeding.

Source: Philips Fabric of Africa, [www.philips.com/a-w/about/sustainability/healthy-people/supporting-communities/fabric-of-africa/mission/philips-views.html](http://www.philips.com/a-w/about/sustainability/healthy-people/supporting-communities/fabric-of-africa/mission/philips-views.html); Interview with Jan-Willem Scheijgrond, Head of International Partnerships, Philips.



## Act

Taking action within a company's direct control is an essential starting point for promoting women's empowerment. This includes adjusting company policies, practices, and investments that impact women along the value chain. Among the examples of company actions are efforts by Salesforce and Gap Inc. to eliminate gender pay gaps at all levels, Maersk's work to institute universal maternity leave, and HSBC's target to achieve gender parity in approximately 550 of its most senior roles by 2020.<sup>54</sup>

This is not exclusive to actions that affect direct employees. Many companies have committed to promoting the International Labour Organization Decent Work Programme throughout their value chain. Other companies have committed to sourcing more from female-owned businesses or creating new products tailored to the needs of women. For example, as part of Walmart's Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative, the company has committed to sourcing US\$20 billion from women-owned businesses for its U.S. business and doubling its sourcing from women suppliers in other countries where it does business by 2016. Walmart is also developing a logo to help consumers easily recognize products from women-owned businesses. Purchasing an item that is Women-Owned Certified means customers are supporting a business that is at least 51 percent owned by women and also run by a woman.<sup>55</sup>

Marketing and communications to promote positive self-image and equality are other important actions. Evofem and WomanCare Global are tackling misconceptions about the female body and advancing access to contraception.<sup>56</sup> Retailers including Target are moving toward gender-neutral signage and communications.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, a number of toy companies, such as Goldieblox, are developing products that encourage girls to engage in science and technology and remove gender stereotypes for both girls and boys. "Act" can also include providing accurate and transparent product labeling of ingredients and potential side effects, particularly for pregnant women and children. For example, Procter & Gamble and Kimberly-Clark are increasing the transparency of ingredients in their feminine products.<sup>58</sup>

In the healthcare sector, Eli Lilly has committed to creating diverse representation in clinical trials as a way to gain insight into making medicines that match the populations most likely to use them. Lilly has nearly 450 diverse clinical trial sites in the United States and is also training minority physicians to conduct clinical trials.<sup>59</sup> Patient Access to Cancer care Excellence (PACE), Lilly Oncology's global initiative to encourage public policies and healthcare decisions to accelerate the development of new cancer treatments, has been working to attract more women through education among minorities and women about clinical trials.<sup>60</sup>

Sometimes companies are obliged to act due to regulation or industry standards, while others may find alignment with credible frameworks or commitments like the Women's Empowerment Principles helps inspire and provide the needed impetus and direction for company actions.

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<sup>54</sup> Treanor, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Walmart, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> WomanCare Global, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Target, 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Women's Voices for the Earth, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Lilly, 2016.

<sup>60</sup> O'Connor, 2015.

## IN PRACTICE

## FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION: ACT

**Sodexo**

Paris-based Sodexo, which provides quality-of-life services, including food services and facilities management, has more than 400,000 employees, representing more than 100 nationalities, serving customers in 80 countries. Diversity and inclusion is therefore essential for attracting the best talent and meeting the needs of its diverse customer base. Promoting equal opportunities for women and men is also a part of strengthening the economies and communities where the company works. To this end, the company has developed a Supply Chain Inclusion Program through which it has committed to spend US\$1 billion with 5,000 SMEs, 1,500 of which will be owned and operated by women by 2017, in 40 countries. As part of the program, it is also actively engaging with suppliers who demonstrate a diverse workforce composition and who embrace inclusiveness in their work and own supply chain. The program not only seeks to unlock opportunities for women, it seeks to help the company tap into the best, most agile, and innovative companies. This is a particularly ambitious goal because one of the challenges is creating awareness of the opportunity SMEs have to become a Sodexo supplier. To achieve this goal, the company is making changes in its procurement practices to fit the needs of SMEs. For example, it has developed guidelines to:

- Ensure SMEs have the same ability to find opportunities as other suppliers through improved access and portals/platforms.
- Develop clear processes for how SMEs are found and selected as suppliers.
- Clarify how the logistics network supports and develops SMEs.
- Implement a process to capture comments and feedback from SMEs and remove the barriers faced by SMEs.
- Make requirements for insurance and non-critical certifications relative to the size and risk of the contract.
- Sign up for prompt payment codes and be transparent with SMEs about the payment process.

To accelerate the integration and implementation of the goal, Sodexo created a global supply chain inclusion network, provides awareness-raising and training for supply chain personnel, and it has established measurement and tracking systems to include women-owned SMEs. The company also creates Local Community Supplier Inclusion development processes, which address the training and business-growth needs of an SME, often in partnership with an external expert.<sup>61</sup>

**Enable**

This aspect of the framework includes investments and partnerships that enable NGOs, community organizations, and business partners to promote women's empowerment along the value chain. This could include the creation of products and services, such as IT or financial services, that allow others to support women's health, rights, and wellbeing. Qualcomm, through its Wireless Reach initiative, is collaborating with BSR's HERproject to introduce a 3G mobile version of the workplace-based women's empowerment program and strengthen access to health information and services for female manufacturing workers in China.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Sodexo, 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Covell, 2014.

It could also include, for example, investments that companies make in women's funds or NGOs to provide training to young aspiring technology leaders, frontline health workers, factory and retail workers, or female agriculture producers. AT&T, Google.org, the Verizon Wireless Foundation, and the Adobe Foundation, among others, support Girls Who Code, a nonprofit organization that aims to educate, inspire, and equip high school girls with the skills and resources to pursue opportunities in computing fields.<sup>63</sup> The Women and the Web Alliance, a public-private partnership among USAID, Intel Corporation, and others, seeks to bring more than 600,000 young women online in Nigeria and Kenya in the next three years.<sup>64</sup>



#### SUCCESS FACTORS

### Building Effective Partnerships

Enabling others to advance women's empowerment requires effective partnerships with key actors from government, civil society, and the wider business community. Grassroots women's organizations are particularly important partners as they have long-standing relationships with communities. The following are some key factors for successful partnerships, which builds on lessons in a recent BSR-ICRW report.

- » Go beyond the funder-recipient model by exploring different ways that the company can contribute beyond financial resources
- » Focus on building trust through personal contact and meaningful relationship-building
- » Identify common goals and metrics early in a partnership that are meaningful for all parties involved
- » Take co-designing seriously by listening and recognizing when to cede some control

Local women's organizations can be useful partners for companies that seek to address barriers for women. These organizations can provide invaluable information on what building blocks need to be addressed, and which barriers lend themselves to corporate action. They can also help design and implement solutions, such as setting up childcare facilities or running anti-harassment programs. Many companies have used partnerships to develop and implement holistic approaches. For example, Swasti Health Resource Centre in India has been a critical partner in Gap Inc.'s P.A.C.E program mentioned above.

Corporate foundations play a critical and often catalytic role, providing a safe space to test innovative ideas and determine their feasibility as commercial ventures. Foundations often help kick start partnerships and enable NGOs to secure the funds needed to conduct the due diligence, needs assessments, and local capacity-building for programs to succeed.

<sup>63</sup> Girls Who Code, 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Women and the Web Alliance, 2015.

In many cases, companies are not only using their financial resources but also their data, expertise, employee engagement, and stakeholder networks to drive change. As one stakeholder at the Women Deliver Conference noted, “The private sector has so much more to bring than a checkbook. But it requires a dialogue to figure out where the needs are.”<sup>65</sup> MSD for Mothers is a 10-year, US\$500 million initiative that applies MSD’s scientific and business expertise—as well as its financial resources and experience—to reduce preventable maternal mortality worldwide. It has partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to expand an innovative supply chain model designed to help improve the availability of contraceptives at health facilities in Senegal. It is also integrating lifesaving products into health systems and health programs such as magnesium sulfate to treat pregnancy-induced high blood pressure and injectable antibiotics to treat newborn infection. To help assess the financial sustainability of the distribution model, MSD is applying its technical expertise to analyze cost-effectiveness.<sup>66</sup>

Through Western Union’s Education for Better program, the Western Union Foundation enables more than 2,000 partners to provide educational and vocational training, promote financial literacy and personal finance skills, and support small businesses in countries including Nepal, Uganda, and Mexico.<sup>67</sup> EY (the company formerly known as Ernst & Young) created the Women Athletes Business Network (WABN) in recognition of the natural leadership skills of female athletes. Through the WABN Mentoring Program, EY has partnered with the International Women’s Forum to pair 25 elite female athletes each year with female senior business executives to help them become high-impact leaders outside of their sport.<sup>68</sup>

Another example is the way the Turkish newspaper Hürriyet is using its publications, advertising campaigns, and training programs to raise awareness of domestic violence and provide support to victims. As part of the company’s “No to Domestic Violence” campaign, which started in 2004, Hürriyet partnered with a women’s NGO to create Turkey’s first 24/7 operational hotline, where specially trained psychologists provide victims of violence with psychological, legal, information, and safety support.<sup>69</sup>

By pooling resources with others, companies can help catalyze and scale innovations. In 2013, Bayer partnered with the Clinton Health Access Initiative to cut the price of its long-acting, reversible contraceptive implant Jadelle (which lasts for up to five years), from US\$18 to US\$8.50 per implant. As part of the initiative, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided a market guarantee that assured funding for at least 27 million implants for women in developing countries over six years.<sup>70</sup> The Goldman Sachs Foundation and the International Finance Corporation partnered to build on the company’s 10,000 Women entrepreneurship training and mentoring program by establishing the Women Entrepreneurs Opportunity Facility, which will raise up to US\$600 million in capital through investments from additional public and private co-investors to enable approximately 100,000 women entrepreneurs to access capital.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Stakeholder at Women Deliver private sector pre-conference.

<sup>66</sup> MSD for Mothers, 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Western Union Foundation, 2016.

<sup>68</sup> EY, 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Hürriyet Kurumsal, 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Bayer, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Goldman Sachs, 2014.

## IN PRACTICE

## FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION: ENABLE

**Procter & Gamble**

Women influence the purchase of almost every product that P&G makes and sells. This gives the consumer products company incredible insight into the needs and challenges facing girls and women at different stages of their lives. This also means the company is uniquely positioned to empower and improve the wellbeing of girls and women through their products, education and marketing, and direct and indirect employment.

Over the last decade, P&G and its family of brands have engaged millions of girls and women in a range of programs, including health- and puberty-education initiatives and confidence-building campaigns such as #LikeAGirl that seek to break down gender stereotypes. It launched the campaign in 2014 with a film showing how harmful words can contribute to lower self-confidence. The film has been viewed more than 90 million times across the globe. TED is joining the Always #LIKEAGIRL campaign to develop TED-Ed educational videos that aim to provide the latest information to educators and parents about how girls can retain confidence during puberty.

The company has also partnered with NGOs, governments, and international organizations to strengthen vaccination rates and access to clean drinking water in developing countries. For more than 10 years, Pampers and UNICEF have been working to vaccinate women and children around the world from maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT). The 1 Pack = 1 Vaccine program enables consumers to support this lifesaving program through each purchase of Pampers diapers. The program has helped eliminate MNT from 15 countries through more than 300 million vaccine donations.<sup>72</sup>

P&G has also created the Children's Safe Drinking Water Program, which provides clean drinking water using a simple, low-cost, household-level, powdered water-treatment technology in a packet developed by a laundry chemist at P&G, in collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For women, access to safe drinking water not only helps prevent disease, it frees women from the burden of fetching water. It is estimated that girls and women spend up to six hours per day fetching water, and is one of the biggest barriers keeping young girls from attending school.<sup>73</sup> P&G provides the water-purification packets below cost through community-based social markets and for emergency relief. A key component is education about the importance of safe drinking water to bring about long-term behavior change. Educational efforts are currently being focused on local school programs and health clinics.

Since the program began, the company has provided 10 billion liters of clean water in more than 75 countries in collaboration with around 150 partners. The company recently opened a new manufacturing facility in Singapore, is forging new partnerships throughout the world, and is extending program operations into more countries. The company aims to provide 15 billion liters of clean water by 2020.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Pampers, 2016.

<sup>73</sup> UN Water, 2013.

<sup>74</sup> Children's Safe Drinking Water campaign, 2016.



## Influence

Influence includes research, advocacy, and communications that companies do to build an environment that promotes equality and opportunities for women. It can include dialogue with policymakers on changes to health and safety standards or minimum-wage laws that affect female factory or retail workers. For example, Johnson & Johnson, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and others have partnered with Women Deliver on a Young Leaders Program, currently active in 108 countries, that focuses on girls' and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. It consists of a virtual advocacy university, a speakers bureau for young people, and a seed grant system so that young people are equipped to advocate for better policies and programs to create youth-friendly, stigma-free services to access contraception, sexual health and reproductive care, and education.<sup>75</sup>

Becton Dickinson brings its healthcare expertise to the UN-led Together for Girls initiative to end violence against children, with a focus on sexual violence against girls. An entry point for the work is the Violence Against Children Survey, which provides comprehensive data on the magnitude and consequences of violence against children. These findings serve as the foundation for action and inform solutions that are evidence-based and supported by global partners.<sup>76</sup>

Companies can also participate in external advocacy campaigns that seek to drive widespread industry or societal change. More than 1,000 business leaders are signatories to the UN Women's Empowerment Principles, and many companies have committed to support Every Woman Every Child, a global cross-sectoral movement to address the major health challenges facing women, children, and adolescents. Vittorio Colao, CEO of Vodafone; Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever; and Jes Staley, CEO of Barclays, are impact champions of the UN Women HeforShe Campaign, through which they not only agree to serve as role models and catalysts for change, but also to influence others inside their own companies.

Companies also play important roles as influencers and advocates with policymakers. H&M CEO Karl-Johan Persson met Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to present H&M's request for a further increase of the minimum wage and, in particular, a development of annual wage reviews for workers in the textile industry.<sup>77</sup> Companies like Visa and MasterCard are strategic partners of the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI), a global network of more than 100 financial policymakers from developing and emerging countries.<sup>78</sup> The AFI promotes and develops evidence-based policy solutions that help unlock the potential of the world's 2 billion unbanked people through the power of financial inclusion.<sup>79</sup>

Companies can also use their reach and influence with customers and the public to promote greater investment in and awareness of key issues facing women. Avon and the Avon Foundation lead and fund global and local programs to educate people and support laws to end violence against women. The company uses a range of communications tools and platforms to raise awareness,<sup>80</sup> including

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<sup>75</sup> Women Deliver, 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Together for Girls, 2016.

<sup>77</sup> H&M, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Alliance for Financial Inclusion, "About Us."

<sup>79</sup> Alliance for Financial Inclusion, "How We Work."

<sup>80</sup> Avon, 2016.

#SeeTheSigns of Domestic Violence, a global social media campaign to raise awareness of domestic abuse.<sup>81</sup>

Lastly, by sharing expertise and supporting the creation of robust evidence for interventions in women's empowerment, companies can inspire others to act. Vodafone and Intel support research on how to enable greater access to mobile and web devices and advance socioeconomic development.<sup>82</sup> Levi Strauss & Co. supported research to understand the ambitions and barriers facing female factory workers in the supply chain. This research revealed critical gaps in reproductive healthcare that has served as the foundation for BSR's HERproject, changed the way companies engage with suppliers, and inspired new solutions to address factory-worker health knowledge and access to goods and services.

## IN PRACTICE

## FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION: INFLUENCE

### MasterCard

MasterCard has been a vocal advocate of gender equality and financial inclusion for a number of years. Through the MasterCard Foundation and the MasterCard Center for Inclusive Growth, the company seeks to shape the debate around the importance of inclusive growth and support evidence-building and solutions to unlock the potential of the half of the world's adult population that is currently excluded from the formal financial system.<sup>83</sup>

MasterCard uses its influence with peers, policymakers, and the wider public in a number of ways. It publishes the latest ideas, insights, and research on the drivers of inclusion and growth. The financial inclusion initiative within the foundation also shares best practices across the financial and mobile telecommunications industries and conducts research that helps inform a positive regulatory environment. One of its signature knowledge-sharing activities is the MasterCard Foundation Symposium on Financial Inclusion. Each year, the symposium brings together global leaders in the field to hear about emerging best practices and share lessons learned.<sup>84</sup>

The MasterCard Foundation also supports a number of organizations that are advocating for better policy frameworks, including Women's World Banking, the Alliance for Financial Inclusion, and the World Bank's Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, which develops innovative solutions through practical research and active engagement with financial service providers, policymakers, and funders to enable approaches at scale.

It also holds an annual Innovation Competition under its Fund for Rural Prosperity, an initiative that aims to improve the lives of more than 1 million smallholder farmers and people living in poverty in rural Africa. The competition supports start-up businesses as they launch new, scalable financial services in 24 African countries.<sup>85</sup> Winners include Kifiya, a payment-services provider and enabler of digital financial services in Ethiopia, and Inuka, a non-deposit-taking micro-finance institution that provides financial services, training, and capacity-building to smallholder farmers in East Africa.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Avon Foundation, 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Vodafone, 2014.

<sup>83</sup> MasterCard Center for Inclusive Growth, 2016.

<sup>84</sup> MasterCard Foundation, 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Roy, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> The MasterCard Foundation Fund for Rural Prosperity, 2015.

## CASE STUDY

**Novo Nordisk: Changing Diabetes in Pregnancy**

Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) refers to diabetes occurring during pregnancy, an overlooked condition impacting one in seven pregnant women, or 18 million births globally. Not only does GDM increase birth complications and maternal and newborn deaths, it can also substantially increase the risk of the woman and child developing type 2 diabetes later in life. The key challenge to preventing and treating GDM is that many countries lack the knowledge, skills, and infrastructure to adequately test for and treat GDM. Addressing diabetes in pregnancy is an opportunity to both improve maternal and child health and slow down the global diabetes pandemic.

Novo Nordisk launched the Changing Diabetes® in Pregnancy program as part of its strategy to strengthen access to diabetes care, particularly at critical intervention points such as pregnancy. The program aims to increase access to GDM testing, care, and lifestyle education for pregnant women in low- and middle-income countries. As a leader in diabetes care, the company views this program as an opportunity to share its expertise in diabetes and use its resources and networks to foster maternal health partnerships, strengthen the evidence base, and catalyze change in the way health systems support pregnant women with or at risk of GDM. Novo Nordisk's role can be summarized using the framework for action:

**Enable:** Through partnerships with expert organizations in maternal health and through the World Diabetes Foundation, Novo Nordisk aims to build evidence on the cost-effectiveness of addressing GDM and support demonstration projects that show how it can be done. Demonstration projects in Colombia, in partnership with the Municipal Health Authorities of Barranquilla, and in Nicaragua, with Population Services International (PSI), focused on making testing for GDM an integral part of prenatal care and improving knowledge on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and control blood-sugar levels before delivery. These projects also included important interventions to build the capacity of healthcare providers and of community health workers who engage with the pregnant women in the local community. By the end of the three-year project in Colombia, screening for GDM in the municipality had increased from 5 percent to 97 percent. The two projects have also resulted in health worker training materials, case studies, and infographics, which can inspire replication in other communities.

**Influence:** The company also advocates for change through engagement with the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), which, with input from Novo Nordisk and international experts, developed the global framework for action to improve GDM diagnosis and care for women with GDM. This represented a major milestone in the fight to improve GDM care. The framework includes evidence-based recommendations for different regional and resource settings based on their financial, human and infrastructure resources. Novo Nordisk has also supported the development of the GeDiForCE model, a health economic tool to support GDM policymaking around the world.

**Act:** Although the program was designed with a focus on Novo Nordisk's role as a catalyst within the global health system, the program is also helping improve internal knowledge about GDM and inform additional actions the company can take to drive progress. The company's Global Medical Affairs department developed educational slides on GDM for their Medical Affairs staff.

Source: Novo Nordisk Changing Diabetes® in Pregnancy. <http://www.novonordisk.com/cdip>; interview with Manager of Changing Diabetes® in Pregnancy Program.

## Guidance for Business: From Ambition to Action

Determining precisely how to apply the principles and framework for action is not necessarily straightforward. To translate these concepts into an actionable agenda, companies need a systematic approach to prioritization and implementation.

This section presents four steps to help translate the principles and framework for action into an effective agenda for an individual company. We include practical guidance, sample tools, and questions to spur dialogue inside companies. It is not intended to be a prescriptive set of recommendations, but rather to assist companies in identifying how they can most effectively strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment along their value chain. The steps include:



### Step 1: Establish the Business Case

As mentioned above, companies not only have a responsibility to ensure respect for women's rights and promote gender equality along their value chain, but it makes good business sense. However, each company and stakeholder along the value chain will have a different reason for prioritizing women's empowerment. Understanding "why" is critically important for making a compelling case for investment and for ensuring that the approach creates value for all stakeholders. When developing the business case, companies are encouraged to engage partners and experts to understand different perspectives throughout the value chain. Some specific activities to undertake include:

- » **Understand how women are impacted by the company along the value chain.** It is possible that women may be impacted in multiple and various ways. For example, marketing and sales decisions will likely impact women involved in the delivery or retail sales of products, but they will also impact women as consumers of both information and products and services.
- » **Clarify how the company and business partners could benefit from women's contributions along the value chain.** This requires understanding how women contribute to the value chain. This could also explore how women can contribute more fully to the value chain and what is holding them back from doing so. For example, women may make up the majority of workers in manufacturing, making them essential to productivity and operational effectiveness. However, a lack of convenient, safe, and affordable childcare could be leading to absenteeism and stress, affecting their productivity.
- » **Determine how promoting women's empowerment and equality creates value for the company and stakeholders and helps fulfill company values.** As noted above, greater participation of women in the design of products and services helps ensure they reflect the needs of an increasingly important consumer demographic. Companies can use the key business drivers highlighted above as a point of departure. It is also important to reiterate why gender equality is important from a corporate and individual values perspective.
- » **Understand how the socioeconomic context drives business action.** This includes how cultural norms, laws, and policies present risks and opportunities for women and the company. For example, consider how laws that prohibit women from owning property or accessing agriculture extension services affect the stability of supply for companies.

The table below raises a few of the key questions that companies can use to understand how the company interacts with women and the importance of women's empowerment to driving value. This is largely based on consumer products companies and may be less relevant to service companies in hospitality, healthcare, and the financial sectors. Companies should tailor this to their own specific needs.

Table 1: Establishing the Business Case

Value Chain Stage	Questions to Clarify the Business Case
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Are products designed specifically for women a potential area of growth?</li> <li>» Are women's unique needs prioritized or considered in product and service design and delivery?</li> <li>» Are women of different income levels included in market research as a unique target group?</li> </ul>
Raw Material Extraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What role do women play in the extraction of raw materials?</li> <li>» How could increasing women's productivity and resilience affect your business?</li> <li>» How do company procurement practices affect women producing raw materials?</li> </ul>
Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» What factors impact employee attendance and retention? Employee health, cultural norms, violence or threats of violence, and infrastructure issues can</li> </ul>

	<p>all play a role. What effect does this have on suppliers/factories?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» How would increasing the number of female-owned businesses in the supply chain affect company procurement processes and costs?</li> <li>» How does the fluctuation in sales impact female factory workers and supply-chain resilience?</li> <li>» Are workplaces gender-sensitive? For example, do they provide sanitary pads and nursing or pumping facilities?</li> </ul>
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» How would changes to parental leave policies affect female employee attraction and retention?</li> <li>» Are there any areas where women face discrimination or are at a disadvantage in accessing opportunities relative to men?</li> <li>» What is the ratio of female-to-male employees at various levels? Are mechanisms of gender segregation for specific jobs/levels at play?</li> <li>» Do female employees have the same opportunities for in-company promotion as men? What factors hinder or assist women in reaching the top or taking up leadership positions?</li> </ul>
Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» How could increasing leadership opportunities for female salespeople affect sales?</li> <li>» Are there nontraditional distribution channels that would affect sales among women?</li> <li>» How could gender-sensitive sales and marketing tactics affect women's perception of the company?</li> <li>» Would a greater proportion of female retailers or distributors affect sales positively?</li> </ul>
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» How would changes to products and services—such as changing prices or sizes—increase sales and access among low-income women?</li> <li>» Do opportunities exist to challenge harmful gender norms proactively, through consumer awareness and partnerships with community leaders and civil society?</li> </ul>

## Step 2: Set Priorities

Once companies have identified why women's empowerment is important along the value chain, they can identify which building blocks are most relevant for women. This step will help companies answer questions such as: Which of the building blocks would have the greatest impact on improving opportunities for women to contribute to the value chain, given the sector, geographies, and business operations? What should our company prioritize for investment?

While every building block is important, not all building blocks will be a priority for investment because they are already fulfilled or being addressed by others. Laws (and their enforcement) and norms in different countries play an important role in determining how important the building block is to women, and how this contributes to their ability to participate fully at work and in society. As laws are more advanced than their implementation in many countries, companies find that adhering to national laws is often a good guideline.



As noted earlier, a holistic approach not only looks at individual building blocks, but also how they interact. This is particularly important when considering how some of the building blocks that might have a longer ROI, such as voice and policy influence, affect other building blocks, such as access to economic opportunities.

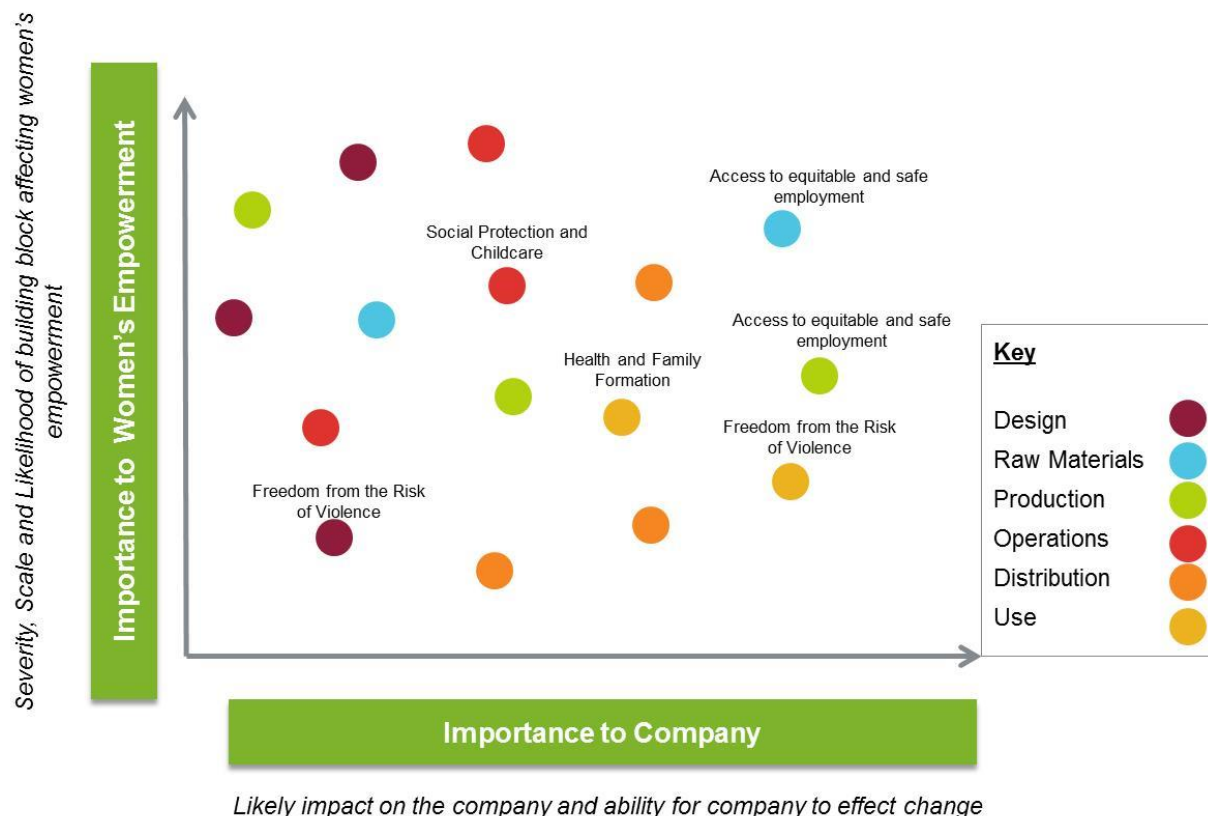
For this step, companies can adapt their approach to a strategic materiality analysis for women's empowerment.<sup>87</sup> The issues under consideration would include the building blocks, and the criteria taken into account would reflect the importance and relevance to business as well as the scale, severity, and likelihood of the building block affecting empowerment for women in the value chain. Below is some guidance for prioritizing the building blocks, followed by a sample materiality analysis. The visual below offers a high-level snapshot of what such a materiality analysis could look like, but companies are encouraged to adapt and refine the building blocks and criteria in a way that best suits them.

- » **Tailor the business importance criteria to reflect corporate values, impact on the company, and ability for impact.** This includes identifying the likelihood and scale of impact of the building block on the company and the ability for the company to drive change. Companies should determine how to weigh the criteria based on their own strategic priorities. Companies may also find it valuable to discuss the current situation as well as future priorities.
- » **Engage stakeholders to develop and rank the building blocks.** This includes engaging internal leaders and functional teams as well as women's rights organizations, academic experts, and, potentially, women stakeholders in the value chain to ensure results reflect the key issues facing women. Companies may also choose to add to or further classify the building blocks to align with global frameworks such as the Women's Empowerment Principles or other relevant frameworks. For example, companies may choose to break down the first building block on equitable and safe employment into fair wages, safe working conditions, and so on.
- » **Assess the building blocks by stage of the value chain.** Companies will capture the most value from the materiality analysis by tailoring it to their specific value chain. In some cases, this may be categorizing the building blocks by value chain segment, the role of women in the value chain, and/or geography.
- » **Explore synergies between priority issues in different parts of the value chain.** There are two aspects to this. First, the analysis should take into consideration the interconnections between issues that underline a holistic approach. Second, the analysis should explore synergies between different parts of the value chain. For example, it may be possible that freedom from the risk of violence is a material issue for women in the supply chain as well as for consumers. This could present unexplored areas of synergy between different functions and initiatives inside the company.

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<sup>87</sup> Materiality analysis is a common approach to prioritization for strategy and financial reporting purposes. In sustainability, it often refers to prioritizing direct or indirect impacts on an organization's ability to create, preserve, or erode economic, environmental, and social value for itself, its stakeholders, and society at large. For more information, see Global Reporting Initiative, [www.globalreporting.org/standards/G3andG3-1/guidelines-online/TechnicalProtocol/Pages/MaterialityInTheContextOfTheGRIReportingFramework.aspx](http://www.globalreporting.org/standards/G3andG3-1/guidelines-online/TechnicalProtocol/Pages/MaterialityInTheContextOfTheGRIReportingFramework.aspx).

Figure 2: Setting Priorities through a Women's Empowerment Materiality Analysis



### Step 3: Identify Opportunities for Action

Once companies have identified areas of high and low importance, they can develop a strategic plan for action. This means identifying areas where the company can act, enable, and/or influence. As part of this exercise, companies should do a gap and opportunity assessment to determine how well the company is addressing the priorities and where gaps and opportunities remain for action. Identifying opportunities for action should consider a number of factors, including the key assets the company has at its disposal. It should also take into account feasibility as well as the likely financial and social costs and benefits for all parties: company, women, partners, and communities.

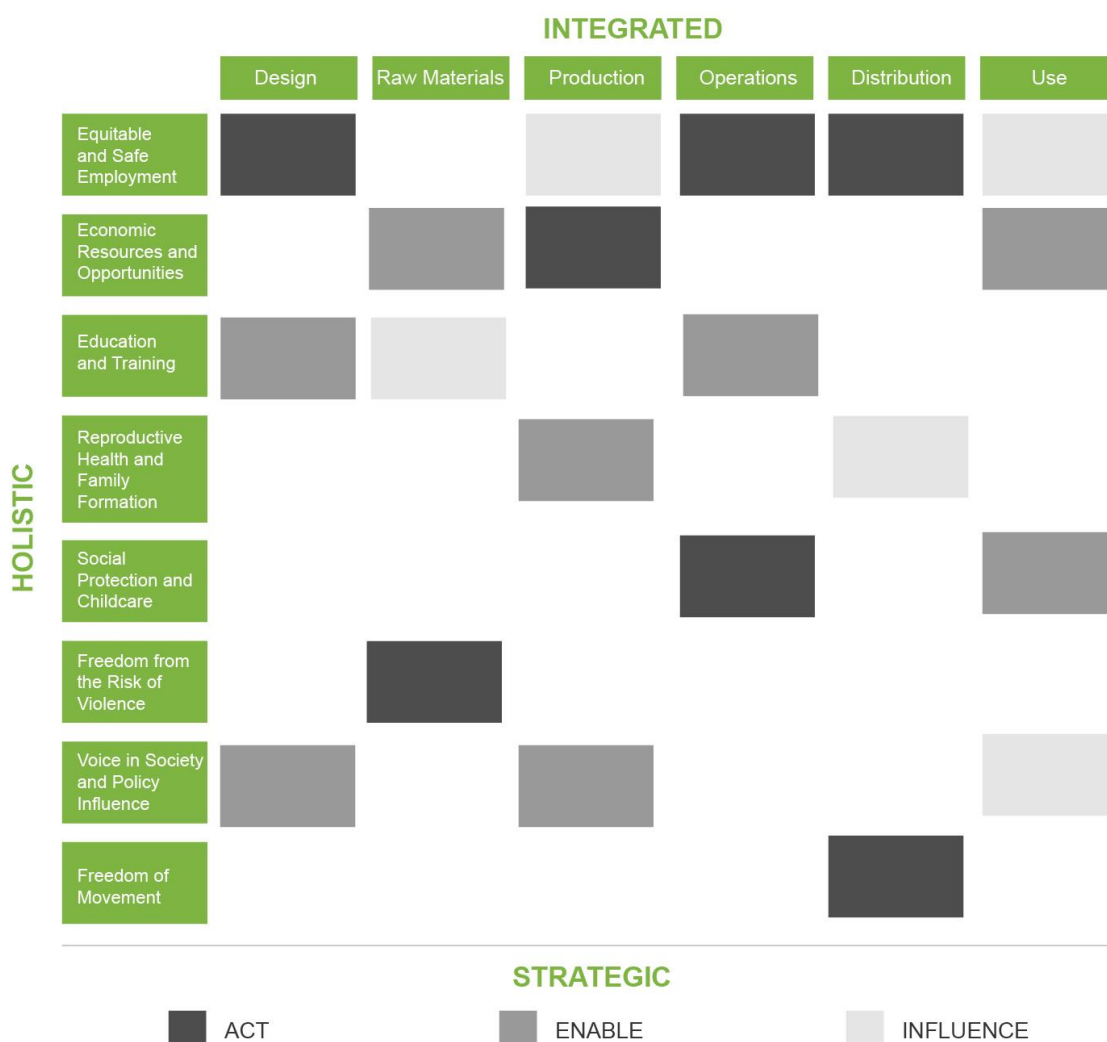
The following guidance can help companies identify opportunities for action. The table below is also an illustrative tool to help companies categorize the types of actions they can take to address building blocks along the value chain. The table headers should be the result of step 2.

- » **Assess current activities and performance.** Conducting a review of all the existing efforts to address the priorities is important to determine where companies need to improve current strategies or create entirely new ones. It may be useful to draw on existing tools such as the Women's Empowerment Principles Gap Analysis Tool (currently in development). Companies may also find it useful to engage other stakeholders to understand how peers, business partners, and other actors are addressing these issues as a way to assess performance.

- » **Consider company control, feasibility, and capacity when determining approach.**  
Companies are encouraged to start with a long list of potential actions needed to drive change and then classify those where the company can act, enable, and influence. It is also important to note where the company cannot take action at the moment and why. When determining whether a company can act, they should consider factors such as their control over the issue, the availability of resources, and whether they have the expertise and know-how to address the issue.
- » **Identify and nurture the right partnerships.** The success of a strategic and differentiated approach to women's empowerment depends on the expertise, resources, and networks of other partners in the value chain. Bringing different stakeholders into the planning process can help create that buy-in and also draw on the knowledge and skills of a wider range of actors.

The figure below is a sample set of opportunities for action mapped against the eight building blocks and the value chain. This is most relevant to a consumer products company but could easily be adapted to a services value chain.

Figure 3. Opportunities for Action



## Step 4: Integrate and Implement

Implementing the opportunities for action requires a supportive governance structure, culture, and measurement systems within the company. Research recently conducted by BSR and ICRW revealed that taking an integrated and holistic approach to women's empowerment requires understanding gender norms and systemic challenges facing women across every function in companies. This requires looking at company key performance indicators, employee engagement, and incentive structures through a new lens to determine whether they make it easier or harder to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>88</sup>

In many companies, existing systems and structures are ill-equipped to integrate women's empowerment. Most investments in women's economic empowerment have developed organically and from the grassroots level within companies. As a result, women's empowerment initiatives are often housed in different parts of a company with little means of communicating progress. Other challenges exist as well. For example, there is no standard global method or metrics, and only a couple of countries have introduced some kind of mandatory gender reporting—for example, on gender pay.<sup>89</sup> While many companies report the female-to-male ratio of employees, a few pioneering companies, especially in the tech industry, have started to share these numbers by cohort level as well as by new hires. Other metrics are still needed to capture a more comprehensive picture of gender equality and women's empowerment across all levels in the value chain.

The following guidance can help companies establish the right systems and structures internally for implementation.

- » **Develop aspirational goals, realistic targets, and clear accountabilities.** This includes identifying senior leadership responsibilities and role-modeling for women's empowerment, as well as creating appropriate incentives and accountability mechanisms that promote inclusion inside companies. This should also filter into individual department responsibilities—for example, goals and targets for individual brands, retail operations, and procurement departments, among others.
- » **Foster a culture of inclusion.** An important part of fostering inclusion is recognizing and showcasing where, how, and why unconscious biases exist and developing systematic strategies and interventions to expose them and root them out. That can mean changing long-held beliefs and deeply ingrained behaviors, a process that takes time and can be difficult and unsettling for many individuals and teams. Engaging senior leadership as champions and vocal advocates is important for setting the tone and fostering inclusion inside companies.
- » **Measure and report meaningful gender-disaggregated data and outcomes.** Developing metrics and reporting mechanisms on gender equality and women's empowerment across the value chain can help assess progress, identify areas for improvement, and create a foundation for dialogue with stakeholders. This includes regular metrics to assess ongoing progress as well as program-specific evaluations of outcomes and impacts.

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<sup>88</sup> BSR and ICRW, 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Mason, 2016.

Table 2: Integrating Women's Empowerment in Governance, Measurement, and Culture

Ingredient to Success	Recommendations	Company Example
Governance	<p>Create cross-functional teams to share lessons and explore synergies across the value chain.</p> <p>Establish a common vision and goals, and communicate these to partners in the value chain.</p> <p>Ensure clear responsibilities and incentives for women's empowerment are part of senior leaders' and department performance reviews.</p>	<p>Unilever has set an ambitious target to have women represent 50 percent of its management. The agenda has the strong support of CEO Paul Polman, who also chairs the Global Diversity Board. This board comprises leaders from across functions and geographies who come together to steer strategy and review performance.</p>
Measurement	<p>Identify meaningful metrics that can inspire dialogue and improvements through the industry.</p> <p>Provide an honest assessment of challenges and areas of improvement.</p> <p>Integrate measurement into engagement with partners along the value chain.</p>	<p>Intel publishes an annual diversity and inclusion report that provides hard data on gender and racial diversity throughout the company, including in hiring, retention, and advancement. It also shares lessons and insights on the progress of various diversity initiatives.<sup>90</sup></p>
Culture	<p>Engage men, including employees, executives, and spouses in dialogue and goal-setting on gender equality.</p> <p>Recognize unconscious bias in the organization and pursue training and dialogue to address it.</p> <p>Leverage company credibility to shift norms and mindsets in communities.</p>	<p>Barclays is focused on cultivating a culture change inside the company through an unconscious-bias program for senior leaders as well as shared dialogue at every level of the organization. As part of its HeforShe campaign, the company asks colleagues to name actions they will take in support of gender equality. This approach has attracted men and women alike. In 2015, 60 percent of new members to Barclays' Women's Initiative Network (WIN) were men.<sup>91</sup></p>

<sup>90</sup> Intel, 2015.<sup>91</sup> UN Women, HeforShe, 2016.

## Way Forward

The ambition and commitment of the public and private sectors to advance women's equality is greater than ever. Now is the time to build stronger economies, healthier communities, and thriving businesses through what UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called a “quantum leap in women's economic empowerment.”

This report set out to show that it can be done through practical examples and models, and help companies make gender equality a reality through a holistic, integrated, and strategic approach. Collaboration is key: Not only will collaboration provide learning and insight into what is working, it offers an essential way to overcome common barriers and allow companies to draw on diverse expertise to develop and scale innovative solutions.

Fortunately, more decision-makers in public and private spheres recognize the value in bringing diverse voices and interests together. There are a number of excellent opportunities for collaboration, a few of which include:

- » **The UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment:** Against the backdrop of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, UN Secretary General established the first-ever UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment in 2015. It is comprised of influential leaders from government, business, academia, and civil society and aims to demonstrate leadership and commitment, highlight key areas for accelerating women's economic empowerment and make action-oriented recommendations on how all sectors can work together to improve economic outcomes for girls and women. The private sector is playing a key role in shaping the recommendations.
- » **Deliver for Good:** Women Deliver's Deliver for Good campaign aims to mobilize multi-sector allies to redefine the narrative around girls and women—from the most vulnerable, to agents of change and critical drivers of progress. It is helping to build a movement to fuel concrete action and implementation of the SDGs at the global and country levels through 12 key investments. The Women Deliver Global Conferences will continue to serve as a key platform for collaboration, monitor progress against concrete targets, and accelerate momentum towards achieving the SDGs. To sign the Deliver for Good commitment for girls and women, access useful resources and case studies, and learn more about how to engage with the Deliver for Good campaign, please visit [DeliverforGood.org](https://www.deliverforgood.org).
- » **HERproject:** HERproject is a global public-private partnership to empower low-income women working in global supply chains through workplace programs promoting health, financial inclusion, and positive gender relationships. Launched in 2007, HERproject is active in 14 countries and has partnered with nearly 60 international companies, 420 workplaces, and 24 civil society partners to reach more than 500,000 women. HERproject consists of HERfinance, HERhealth, and HERrespect.
- » BSR and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs (MINBUZA) have launched a partnership to mobilize private-sector action for women empowerment. This partnership aims to support



concrete actions as a follow-up to the Women Deliver private sector pre-conference using the framework for action featured in this report. There are two core activities of the partnership:

- **Business Action for Women Network:** This Network will serve as a platform to inspire ambition, increase impact, and catalyze scalable corporate solutions to support women's global progress. It will drive collective progress for women through a shared action framework and cross-industry and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Companies who join the Network will co-create a clear call to action to the private sector and a framework to measure business contribution to women's economic empowerment. They will also be able to share lessons with peers, explore partnership opportunities, and identify new opportunities to fill gaps in existing private-sector action on women's empowerment.
- **Women's Empowerment in Global Supply Chains:** This includes a series of partnerships with key organizations and companies including Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI), Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition (EICC), Floriculture Sustainability Initiative (FSI), International Council of Toy Industries – CARE Foundation (ICTI CARE), The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH), and Sedex to advance women's empowerment in global supply chains. These partnerships will focus on making women's empowerment central to supply chain management strategies, guidelines, and practices. The collaboration brings together organizations of varying scopes, sizes, strategies, and operating models that all commit to gender equality as part of their missions. To inform this new partnership, BSR is developing a guidance document that clarifies why, where, and how to integrate the rights and needs of women in global supply chain Codes of Conduct and standards manuals.

There is a strong global mandate for economic and social development through the new SDGs—gender equality and empowerment will underpin success. The new, ambitious global agenda requires that all sectors work together. It is no longer sufficient to consider global development to be almost exclusively the domain of the public sector. The private sector has innovation, scale and reach to help make this new agenda a reality. They also have a stake in making it happen: Investments in women power progress for all.

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## About BSR

BSR is a global nonprofit organization that works with its network of more than 250 member companies and other partners to build a just and sustainable world. From its offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR develops sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. Visit [www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org) for more information about BSR's 25 years of leadership in sustainability.

## About Women Deliver

As a leading global advocate for girls' and women's health, rights, and wellbeing, Women Deliver brings together diverse voices and interests to drive progress, particularly in maternal, sexual, and reproductive health and rights. It builds capacity, shares solutions, and forges partnerships, together creating coalitions, communication, and action that spark political commitment and investment in girls and women. Women Deliver believes that when the world invests in girls and women, everybody wins. Learn more at [WomenDeliver.org](http://WomenDeliver.org).

## About the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates and carries out Dutch foreign policy at its headquarters in The Hague and through its missions abroad. It is likewise the channel through which the Dutch Government communicates with foreign governments and international organizations. As a country that looks beyond its borders, the Netherlands is committed to building a safe, stable, and prosperous world. In The Hague, and at more than 150 embassies and consulates worldwide, staff are actively involved in addressing issues such as poverty reduction, climate change, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and eliminating conflict.

The Ministry also coordinates Dutch foreign trade and development cooperation.

The aims for trade and development cooperation are:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty ("getting to zero") in a single generation;
2. To achieve sustainable, inclusive growth all over the world, i.e., economic growth from which the poor also benefit;
3. To ensure success for Dutch companies abroad.

Respect for women's rights and the promotion of gender equality are a priority across Dutch foreign policy.