Gender-inclusive service provision:

A quick guide for financial and business development services providers

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Foreword

Financial and business development services providers have an influential role in unlocking women entrepreneurs' potential. They also stand to benefit from providing them with gender-inclusive services. Since women entrepreneurs often are an underserved and untapped client-base for service providers, they represent a market opportunity. For instance, the unmet demand for finance among women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises in emerging markets was $1.7 trillion in 2017, while three quarters of women reported being dissatisfied with their banking services. Women entrepreneurs also tend to be better loan repayers than men. A 2017 Global Banking Alliance for Women study found that the non-performing loan rate for women-led small and medium-sized enterprises was 33 per cent lower than the rate for men. Despite facing barriers, such as unequal access to business skills and finance, gendered norms and the uneven distribution of care work, women-led businesses have also been found to be more productive than businesses run by men.

In addition to contributing to gender equality and economic growth, service providers that effectively target and tailor their services to women entrepreneurs would benefit from this segment's higher repayment rate and productivity as well as from an expanded client base.

This guide was developed to provide practical guidance on how providers of financial or business development services can become more gender-inclusive. It was produced as a collaboration between the International Labour Organization's Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme and the Rebuilding Better: Fostering Business Resilience Post-COVID-19 Project, supported by J.P. Morgan.

As we collectively seek to support an inclusive and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, fostering greater gender equality and inclusiveness in financial and business development services must become a priority. Although this makes business sense for service providers, it is also essential to ensure we leave no one behind and continue to make progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. With this guide, we hope service providers in South-East Asia and beyond will find actionable tools and inspiration to start and continue this particular journey towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.

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Introduction

Welcome! This guide for financial and business development services providers is designed to help you, as a company or individual providing services to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), to be more gender-inclusive in your work. Applying a gender lens to your approach and offerings will, without doubt, improve your service delivery to women entrepreneurs, your own business outcomes and the communities where you work.

With this guide you will learn about the benefits of targeting women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses and how to tailor products and service delivery to them. We give you step-by-step guidance for how to begin to incorporate gender-inclusive strategies into your content and delivery of services, helping you to set the foundations for better overall impact and effectiveness.

This guide is particularly useful for professionals working in public sector agencies and supporting private sector and MSME development. It is also designed for private or corporate financial or business development services providers who are supporting MSMEs, including professional advisers and counsellors.

As a result of using this guide, providers of financial or business development services will be able to:

▶ understand gender inclusion as it relates to their business model;

▶ identify the differentiated needs of women entrepreneurs in their market; and

▶ apply their understanding of gender inclusion to their content, product design and delivery to improve the products and services offered to women entrepreneurs.

How to use this guide

▶ If you are new to this work: Start with the Definitions and concepts (section 2) to clarify the ideas we are working from and then move into Why gender inclusion is important.

▶ The Why gender inclusion is important (section 3) might be a good starting point if you are aiming to convince senior management or decision-makers at your organization to adopt a gender lens.

▶ If you are ready to begin incorporating gender into your work but have never thought about it before and want to begin slowly or are very interested in establishing good data for your baseline, the Preparatory steps (section 4) can help you begin.

▶ If you have limited resources for data collection and/or analysis, already know a little about gender inclusion or are keen to begin putting these inclusion techniques into practice, you can turn directly to the gender-inclusive Design and gender-inclusive Delivery portions of section 5 and find practical strategies to use right away.

▶ Everyone can benefit from reading about Measuring success (section 6). Once you have worked through these strategies, look to Next steps (section 7) for where to go for more guidance to continue your gender-inclusion journey.

▶ 2

Definitions and concepts

This list of definitions explains the concepts that are used throughout this guide in the context of business development services. These concepts and additional definitions are included in Annex II.

▶ **Business development services:** A wide range of non-financial services used by entrepreneurs to help them to operate efficiently and develop their businesses. These services may include training, consultations, marketing and information resources that help enterprises gain access to additional services.[1] They are sometimes referred to as business support services, small enterprise advisory services or enterprise development.

▶ **Gender:** Refers to the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for different groups of people (men and women). In addition to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations between women and those between men.[2]

▶ **Gender-inclusive:** This term refers to initiatives, activities or programmes that are open to both men and women but are designed to overcome any barriers to the full participation that one of the two sexes may experience. In most cases, it targets the increased participation of women and girls. Implementing gender-inclusive programmes is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias.[3]

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1   Adapted definition from ILO Thesaurus, "business development service", https://metadata.ilo.org/thesaurus/-409091984. html.

2   Adapted from ILO, *Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check – WE-Check, An Assessment to Improve Service Provision to Women Entrepreneurs: Implementation Guide*, 2019.

3   Adapted from International Finance Corporation, Guide to Training Gender Supplement, 2020.

▶ **Gender-neutral:** Something that is not specific to women or men. This can be policies, investments, projects or business models, whereby it can be assumed that there is no different effect on women or men. Often, something is mistaken to be gender-neutral when it is "gender blind". This means that the policy, programme or business model did not take into account the ways in which it would affect women and men differently. In the end, gender-neutral most commonly means that the needs of men are assumed to be the needs of everyone, which leads to women's needs being left out.[4]

▶ **Women-led business:** A business that is at least 25 per cent owned by one woman or more, whose management and control lie with one woman or more, which has at least one third of the board of directors composed of women (where a board exists), where a woman is a signatory of the business' legal documents and financial accounts and which is operated independently from businesses that are neither led nor owned by women.[5] For the purposes of this document, we consider women-led businesses to include all women-owned businesses.

▶ **Women-owned business:** A business that is more than 50 per cent owned by one woman or more, whose management and control lie with one woman or more, where a woman is a signatory of the business's legal documents and financial accounts and which is operated independently from businesses that are not owned by women.[6]

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4   Adapted from Value for Women, *Gender Inclusion for Innovators – Facilitators Guide*, 2018.
5   Different organizations have definitions and thresholds for women-led businesses (at least 51 per cent of the company is owned by a woman or multiple women) depending on their context and the purpose of the definition. For this guide, we use the definition from ISO IWA34 ISO – IWA 34:2021 - Women's entrepreneurship – Key definitions and general criteria.
6   Your internal definitions of women-owned business may vary (as with women-led business).

3

Why gender-inclusion is important for financial and business development services providers

Why should providers of financial and business development services improve and tailor their service delivery to women?

i. **Good for business:** Targeting women entrepreneurs and taking into account gender-related needs of client businesses can lead to improved business outcomes for financial and business development services providers by increasing their client base and improving the effectiveness of their products and services.[7] For example, providing finance to women-led MSMEs in Indonesia and Viet Nam alone is a $26.1 billion opportunity.[8] Women-led businesses represent around 35 per cent of MSMEs in developing and emerging markets and have a lower average rate of growth than MSMEs run by men.[9] This indicates a

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7   Women's World Banking, "New Research Finds That Key to Women-led Business Growth Lies in Tailored Financial Services", December 2020.

8   D. Olsen, "MSME Finance Gap Database", SME Finance Forum, 2018.

9   Alliance for Financial Inclusion, "A Policy Framework for Women-led MSME Access to Finance", January 2021.

ripe opportunity for providers of financial or business development services to expand their provision of products and services to new clients that are women-led enterprises.

▶ **Box 1. Growing your client base of women entrepreneurs: Ernst & Young**

Ernst & Young launched **Entrepreneurial Winning Women** to target the "missing middle" – women entrepreneurs with profitable businesses that can achieve ambitious growth plans. They found that through their support (networks, connections to business advisers, strategic scaling process management and access to capital), the women-led businesses had an average annual revenue growth of 49 per cent and average annual job growth of 26 per cent.

Source: Ernst & Young, *Women: The Next Emerging Market – Supporting Women to Fulfill Their Potential*, 2013.

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ii. **Creates bigger economic and social impact**: Improving service delivery to women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses can generate positive economic and social development outcomes, with ripple effects in the economy more broadly. McKinsey and Company estimates that countries in the Asia–Pacific region could add $4.5 trillion to their collective annual gross domestic product by 2025 (a 12 per cent increase), primarily by increasing women's labour force participation ratio, the number of hours women work and the number of women working in high-productivity sectors.[10] Evidence suggests that women entrepreneurs with better access to assets and who can make their own decisions regarding the use of their income also can affect poverty reduction.[11] A vibrant, growing economy with accessible opportunities for new businesses offers providers of financial or business development services growth potential and new clients.

iii. **Improves equality**: While skills training and financial access can improve outcomes for both women and men entrepreneurs, general financial and business development service support does not replace the need for gender-specific interventions and services.[12] Products and services tailored to women can improve outcomes, drive increased interest in products and services and improve the uptake of financial and business development service offerings by women entrepreneurs. Successful women entrepreneurs are also likely to inspire or support other women to become entrepreneurs.[13] The disproportionately negative effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women entrepreneurs can be mitigated by support aimed at helping women overcome the gendered barriers they face in the business world with tailored products and services to address the gendered barriers.[14]

10   McKinsey and Company, "The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific", 23 April 2018.
11   S. Elsheikh, and S. Elamin, "Women's Economic Empowerment and Poverty: Lessons from Urban Sudan", in The Business & Management Review (London: The Academy of Business and Retail Management, 2016): 194–199. Available at: http://search.proquest.com/docview/1786778175/.
12   World Bank, *Adapting Skills Training to Address Constraints to Women's Participation*, April 2020.
13   Candida Brush, "How Women Entrepreneurs Are Transforming Economies and Communities", Forbes, 22 March 2013.
14   APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy, *Harnessing Fintech Skills of Women-led MSMEs in Promoting Inclusive Growth Against COVID-19,* April 2021.

▶ **Box 2. What do women entrepreneurs look for in service providers?**

▶ Awareness of different leadership styles: Women entrepreneurs are often penalized for the confidence and assertiveness that men are rewarded for. They may have learned more collaborative or democratic and participatory leadership styles rather than paternalistic or autocratic top-down styles. All kinds of personalities and leadership styles can be effective and should be validated in financial and business development services interactions.

▶ Facilitation of access to networks and markets: Some of the biggest hurdles that women entrepreneurs experience are access to networks, access to talent, distribution chains and entrepreneurial ecosystems, which can all be instrumental in ensuring their businesses meet growth targets and help them to scale up their business.

▶ Awareness of different entrepreneurial journeys: Because of gendered barriers, women are more likely to follow a different entrepreneurial journey than men – after a career at a leading company or non-profit organization or after a short stint in the family business, or they start their entrepreneurship journey right away because other job opportunities are not available to them.

▶ Elimination of negative perceptions or false beliefs about women's leadership ability: Women investors and women-led investment funds invest in more women-led businesses, which may be linked to common biases that men in investment roles and men-dominated funds have about women's perceived lack of leadership skills.

▶ More women as service providers: Women may feel more comfortable talking about their needs, business challenges and access gaps with other women, who understand the other responsibilities and expectations put on women as well as their priorities.

▶ Values alignment around both impact and business metrics: Some women founders are keen on investors who share their values and have an interest in impact, not just business metrics. This often results in a desire to preserve the integrity of the business and drives women away from certain funding models that limit their control.

▶ Investor mentorship grounded in shared objectives: Women entrepreneurs may have different objectives than investors looking for high-growth companies or wanting to maximize their return on investment. Ensuring that the mentors for these entrepreneurs can challenge their thinking and provide constructive feedback and strategic advice while still being in line with the business values is a major concern for women founders.

Source: Adapted from Value for Women, *Pathways for Success: Women's Entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia: A Report Outlining What Women Social Entrepreneurs Need to Succeed*, 2021

4

Preparatory steps

We know that getting started can be the most difficult part of a new endeavour. But even small steps towards gender inclusion can make a big difference. Here are a few things you can do if you are just beginning to think about gender inclusion in your organization.

   i. **Commit to applying a gender lens.** Signal your social and gender values internally and externally by making a commitment to formalize your intention to change practices. This will signal to the rest of your organization and your clients that you are planning to take concrete action towards gender inclusion. This is an important step and can be done at any stage in the process. Management should lead this effort and can coordinate inclusion across all business units and functions. A commitment can be informal and expressed verbally or be more structured and in writing, depending on what is appropriate for your context and intended audiences. Setting measurable targets, like the number or percentage of women as clients, trainers and service providers, engenders a clear goal to work towards as an organization. Achievement of these targets can also be helpful for solidifying support within the organization and motivating team members. Timing also counts – an early-stage internal commitment can focus your staff on gender inclusion as a priority, while an external statement can signal to women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses that you are actively seeking to work with them. Your gender commitment can and should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis because your focus on gender inclusion and specific objectives likely will change.

   ii. **Understand your starting point.** Improvements in the provision of services to women entrepreneurs and other impacts will be most clear when you have an explicit starting point from which to compare. This starting point can be set using the organization's own data on clients, publicly available information or new data about the women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses you seek to serve. Gender gaps are usually evident where there are limitations that could impact a woman's ability to start and run a business

(childcare, domestic duties, safety, financial access, formal education level, legal rights).15 How should you go about determining your starting point?

▶ **First**, identify data sources you currently have access to, internal and external. Do you collect sex-disaggregated data on your clients and offerings, or is this data available from public sources, like an SME development agency? This data could include the number of women-led applicants for financial or business development service, the number of women-led businesses that go through due diligence and the number of women-led businesses that are finally selected for financial and business development services (see Annex IV on sex-disaggregated metrics and indicators).

▶ **Second**, look at existing data, break down the data by gender, analyse the participation of women entrepreneurs, review their feedback on products and services. If available, analyse results achieved compared with male entrepreneurs and other insights that flow from this data. Use this analysis to identify what trends there are related to gender.

▶ **Third**, learn more about the external conditions that women entrepreneurs experience, particularly the challenges. Find data on such topics as the limitations that could impact a woman's ability to start and run a business (childcare, domestic duties, safety, financial access, formal education level, legal rights). This will help you understand the differences between men's and women's experiences, the gender-related insights about your products and services and what other factors to consider in your offerings.

▶ **Fourth**, validate your analysis through discussions with local women leaders and gender networks and associations. Some of the major challenges to women's participation in business may be intersectional, indirect or normalized. Understanding them can be improved through qualitative research.

▶ **Fifth**, identify gaps in the data, and consider collecting this data yourself or work with data collectors or aggregators to begin collecting gender metrics.

iii. **Gender analysis of existing practices and products.** Along with an initial analysis of the gender aspects of your past product and service delivery and results based on participation and outcome data, you may want to dig deeper into the way women entrepreneurs engage with your services and their feedback on your offerings, particularly if the business owners utilizing your services are disproportionately men. This gender analysis can be undertaken with the methodologies featured in box III.

You might use the Design and Delivery sections to structure your questions and to solicit feedback that you can use to create more inclusive services. Recognize that each entrepreneur is different and has different needs and experiences and that no one woman is representative of all women, so a large and diverse sample will yield the most useful responses. Try to avoid generalizing. Instead, create and maintain open channels for feedback (email, customer service representatives, short surveys) and be responsive to the evolving needs of prospective women clients at this stage and in the future. After you have performed this analysis, use your findings to inform the design and delivery of your services to make them more gender-inclusive.

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15   There are several places you can find lists of gender-related metrics that might be useful. The IFC Guide to Training, Gender Programs has a comprehensive list of considerations and indicators for training programmes that could also apply to financial and business development services, available at: www.growlearnconnect.org/sites/wkt/files/inline-files/GuideToTraining-Gender%20Programs%20Supp_FIN-Linked_0.pdf.

▶ **Box 3. Methodologies for gender analysis**

▶ Quantitative and qualitative research with women entrepreneurs and women interested in entrepreneurship (interviews, focus group discussions and/or surveys).

▶ Convening a panel discussion or group of experts.

▶ Leveraging local women's groups, accelerators, business schools, leadership training programmes, industry organizations and national institutions or networks to share insights about common concerns and issues as well as differences in the support and resources that women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses obtain when approaching a financial or business development service provider.

▶ **Preparatory steps summary checklist**

☐ Commit to applying a gender lens with management leadership.

☐ Understand your starting point through data analysis.

☐ Analyse your existing practices and products with a gender lens.

5

Getting practical

Once you have decided to implement a gender lens to your practices and policies as a financial or business development service provider, the following strategies can be used to integrate gender awareness into both internal operations and the design and delivery of products and services.

Design of financial and business development services

A growing body of evidence suggests that it is important to incorporate intentional design features to address women-specific barriers, including in their access to and persistence in financing, networks and skills development.[16] Design can communicate non-verbally what types of people are envisioned as participants, whose needs are being addressed and who the organizers had in mind when they put together a particular product or service. Here are a few things you can do to make your programme design more inclusive, which ultimately will result in a product or service that women most likely want or would be more willing to make use of.[17]

    i. **Consider marketing your organization as a "gender forward" provider** or promoting your women-focused products and services through channels targeting women and women-led businesses.

    ii. **Collect data from women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses** and do not rely on assumptions and stereotypes about what women need or want.

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16   Women's World Banking, "New Research Finds That Key to Women-led Business Growth Lies in Tailored Financial Services", 2020.

17   A recent summary of barriers to women's entrepreneurship that may be helpful to consider: Asian Development Bank and The Asia Foundation, *Emerging Lessons on Women's Entrepreneurship in Asia and the Pacific*, October 2018.

▶ **Box 4. Designing for specific needs of women: Bundling services**

In the agriculture sector, for example, we know that often small and medium-sized enterprises have needs that can be addressed through financial or business development services or market linkage support. This is even more important for women entrepreneurs – the barriers they face means that they often operate in lower-value sectors and start their ventures using their own savings or source capital from family and friends. Designing services that combine, or bundle, business training with financial products is one example of how to apply a gender lens. This has proved to have positive benefits for the growth of women-led businesses.[18]

iii. **Include women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses in product or service design.** Base offerings on needs and priorities of these target groups and/or consider the specific needs and challenges faced by women when designing support.[19] Taking a flexible approach to product and service design and incorporating a continuous learning and adaptation approach to incorporate feedback and results can help you to make your programmes more gender-inclusive and also more diverse and sensitive to other needs of marginalized entrepreneurs. We also suggest sharing with women entrepreneurs what skills and leadership styles are currently valued by investors (such as confidence and assertiveness) and to design and offer products and services that help women develop those skills. At the same time, educating and encouraging the business environment and investors in particular to understand their biases and to create selection processes that value a broader range of skills and styles is also important.

▶ **Box 5. Pitch or ditch the pitch?**

Several studies show that women are systematically disadvantaged by the pitching process,[20] which leaves business support services with the question: Is it better to help women entrepreneurs improve their pitching skills or to remove pitching as a practice from selection processes and competitions? Some funders and investment decision-makers continue to rely on pitching despite its proven bias. So, women need these skills to be competitive. However, we encourage you when engaging with investors and other ecosystem actors to consider discussing whether pitching is the right tool in your context or whether other options are available to identify women (and men) with good business models and financials.

iv. **Consider participants' time, financial, mobility and other constraints in the design process.** In addition to running their business, women entrepreneurs may have competing priorities linked to gendered expectations and roles within the community, such as household duties and unpaid care work. This limits the time available for participation in financial or business development service programmes and activities. Cultural norms and practical considerations (such as safety) may also influence the times, locations and environments in which women feel welcome and safe. It is important to recognize and accommodate these constraints, for example, by planning activities during preferred hours or breaking down long training sessions into shorter sessions, arranging childcare or creating a child-friendly training space, identifying activity or training spaces at accessible locations close to women's residences or offices, reimbursing travel costs and organizing online training sessions.

v. **Consider different groups with different needs for your products and services.** While some entrepreneurs might engage with financial or business development service providers to support growth and scaling up their business or to transition to a different financing stage, others might seek out skills or support with other objectives. Understanding these differences can help you meet the needs and expectations of your clients better, including different types of women entrepreneurs.

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18   ILO, *Entrepreneurship Development Interventions for Women Entrepreneurs: An Update on What Works,* 2018.
19   "Adapting Skills Training to Address Constraints to Women's Participation", World Bank Group Jobs Notes 7, April 2020.
20   K. Hassan, M. Varadan, and C. Zeisberger, "How the VC Pitch Process is Failing Women Entrepreneurs", *Harvard Business Review,* 13 January 2020.

vi. Design training exercises and activities (associated with products and services) that **embed diversity and different ways for participants to engage**. Some participants may be vocal and outgoing, others may absorb and process information better through writing or brainstorming or through role play. Anticipating this diversity and allowing for different engagement styles will make your products and services more effective. You can also consider creating opportunities for women founders to nominate other members of their management teams to receive training, given the additional demands on women entrepreneurs' time and resources.

vii. **Set targets for inclusion of women clients and participants.** Based on your data, set targets for inclusion of women in different programmes, services and as clients for your products. Based on the data and metrics selected during your preparatory phase, continue to collect data (qualitative and quantitative) to see which products and services are preferred by women and why others are not attracting your target groups.

viii. Give facilitators, counsellors, advisers, mentors and others in direct service provision **training to overcome their biases and be gender-inclusive**. Incorporate this training into your provision of products and services. This may mean taking into consideration gender norms in the delivery of services; for example, that men are more inclined than women to speak up in larger groups. Some women or participants with marginalized identities may have had less experience speaking in public forums and be less comfortable. Checklist 2 on gender-inclusive service provision has some additional recommendations.

ix. **Build your pipeline of women trainers and facilitators** by recognizing highly skilled women in business and related fields. This can include building up internal capacity by prioritizing the hiring of women to these roles in your organization, providing facilitator training and using gender-inclusive or women-focused networks and channels to reach new women for these roles.

▶ **Box 6. Men and women as mentors for women entrepreneurs**

While women benefit from role models and access to networks of experienced women, men mentors committed to gender inclusion can also help women to access knowledge, services and contacts that they otherwise might not have access to. While some women may be more comfortable being paired with a woman mentor, others may feel this is alienating and perpetuates the marginalization of women entrepreneurs. If providing mentoring support is part of your business services, it is important to understand the preferences of your client base. However, a combination and encouraging both men and women entrepreneurs to cultivate both men and women mentors ensures that a variety of viewpoints, experiences and personalities are valued.

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x. **Establish inclusive marketing and outreach.** Create specific calls for women clients and participants: Let women know that you have them in mind and that their needs will be met. Find and partner with organizations and networks that focus on women and entrepreneurship at various levels to learn about problems that can be addressed through financial and business development services providers and to connect directly with women as potential clients and participants. Effective marketing and outreach for gender-inclusive programming should use language and visual elements that reflect the gender-inclusive intentions of the content, as elaborated in Checklist 1 on gender-inclusive communications. Communication channels and platforms should also be tailored to reach your target clients. Ensure that (a) information reaches women entrepreneurs and any other target audiences through channels and platforms that they use often and (b) that the message and value proposition are appealing to them and speak to their needs, pain points and priorities. Word of mouth is also a powerful tool, which works particularly well in strong networks with high levels of trust among participants.

▶ **Gender-inclusive design summary checklist**

☐ Consider marketing your organization as a gender-inclusive financial or business development service provider (provided it is) or promote specific products or services as targeting women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses.

☐ Listen to the problems, needs and priorities of the women you want to serve through data collection and conversations.

☐ Include women in the product and service design of your offerings.

☐ Design around common constraints (time, financial, location).

☐ Consider different objectives and client needs for your products and services.

☐ Embed valuing diversity in all of your products and services, particularly trainings and group interactions.

☐ Set targets for women clients and participants.

☐ Give product and service providers' staff gender-inclusion training.

☐ Create gender-inclusive marketing and outreach to better communicate about your products and services to women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses.

Delivery of financial and business development services

The method and context surrounding service delivery can affect learning effectiveness and impact of entrepreneurship support. To optimize your product and service delivery's effectiveness, consider the following approaches.

i. **Virtual versus in-person delivery and employing blended approaches.** Women typically experience connectivity challenges and technology skill gaps when accessing virtual products and services. In some contexts, they find that online tools and asynchronous learning are more effective for facilitating access. Blended approaches combine online and in-person methods. Your data collection can include questions that will help you identify whether virtual, in-person or a combination would be most useful in your context for effective delivery.

▶ **Box 7. Blended approach: Road to Growth Programme**

Based on a needs assessment of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria, the Cherie Blair Foundation's Women's Road to Growth Programme tested a flexible delivery model that included peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities. The model used a blended learning approach, combining in-class training with an online learning app. This approach led to significant business impacts, and 88 per cent of participants reported that they found this combination useful. The approach addressed women's needs for flexibility and catered to different learning styles while providing opportunities for networking and the creation of a supportive community of peers.

ii. **Use gender-inclusive language and images.** Using examples about women-led businesses, using images of women business leaders and using inclusive language creates new norms around seeing women in business contexts. It relates participants to real challenges that women have and makes written materials and training more relevant to potential clients. All materials, presentations and communications should follow the guidelines in Checklist 1 on gender-inclusive communications.

iii. **Create an inclusive environment**

    a. **Physical space**: The time, place and location (physical or virtual) of a training or programme will affect who is able to participate and therefore the ability of women to engage and to achieve the learning objectives. Gender inclusion and thinking about women's needs can also be represented in the surroundings and office environment. The location and ease of entry, alcohol-free events, decorations and the greetings by staff at reception – the environment in which your clients meet you – sends a message about who is intended to be in a space, who is welcomed and who will have their needs met. Ensure that your physical space is inviting to women by having good lighting, safe entryways, space for children, appropriate bathroom facilities and hours that accommodate working and care responsibility schedules.

    b. **Value women's skills and contributions**: By encouraging diversity generally and gender inclusion specifically, you can create intentional opportunities for men and women participants to practise soft skills, like leadership and cooperation, and to acknowledge different models of success through awards and other recognition. This practice should translate into more inclusive workspaces and better appreciation for other viewpoints, personalities and approaches.

▶ **Box 8. Valuing collaboration: Connected Women**

When Connected Women ran a start-up weekend event for Asia, they had difficulty achieving their target of 60 per cent women participants. By changing their outreach material to emphasize the collaborative nature of the event and de-emphasizing competition and prizes, they were able to attract women and reached their target.

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    c. **Gender considerations for group situations**: Group sizes and ways of interacting should be organized through a gender lens and should consider the preferences of women entrepreneurs in the specific context. Large, mixed-gender groups may not allow women to fully express themselves or may lead to women being delegated group roles that reinforce gender stereotypes and norms. Trained facilitators may be able to disrupt these gendered patterns by encouraging individuals to interact outside of usual norms and by guiding conversations to allow for all participants to contribute.

▶ **Gender-inclusive communications summary checklist**

☐ Use gender-neutral pronouns (they and them) or an intentional balance of pronouns when not referring to a specific individual.

☐ Ensure that women are well represented in images and audiovisual content.

☐ Be mindful of gender norms and use intentional examples that challenge them.

☐ Avoid oversimplification, stereotypes, objectification and victimization.

☐ Cite women authorities and include both women and men as experts.

▶ **Gender-inclusive delivery summary checklist**

☐   Consider blended approaches, combining virtual and in-person delivery, depending on the needs and preferences of your target clients.

☐   Use gender-inclusive language and images in your delivery.

☐   Create an inclusive environment for product and service delivery.

Walking the talk: Workforce and internal operations

To deliver gender-responsive services to women entrepreneurs, you should position your organization as practising gender inclusion in the workplace and demonstrate that your approach to financial and business development services provision is modelled on your own commitment and practice. This can begin with making a gender commitment, as detailed in the Preparatory steps. But it also should have practical aspects for promoting opportunities for women to thrive at all levels of the organization.

   i.   **Advance gender balance throughout the organization**: Internally, this is likely to have implications at two operational levels – client-facing functions and organizational leadership or decision-making. Evidence shows that having women on selection committees of accelerators creates more diverse applicant pools.[21] And there is research showing that some women clients are more comfortable when services are provided by women. Have women in all roles and parts of the organization, at every level.

  ii.   **Identify and redress gender biases in recruitment**: Ensure that you are tapping into the right networks and channels to identify more women candidates. Review and edit the role descriptions and job adverts to be gender-inclusive. Adjust the shortlisting and screening processes to eliminate hidden biases and to target a number of women candidates at each selection phase. Refer to Checklist 3 on gender-inclusive workplace practices (recruitment) for more details.

 iii.   **Prioritize retention and develop an inclusive workplace:** An inclusive work environment is key for women employee retention and should be supported by gender-forward human resources policies and processes that serve to formalize a healthy organizational culture. Some of the cultural drivers of employee satisfaction are a good work–life balance, a safe work environment, support for parental or caregiver roles, ownership of organizational goals, mission and vision, constructive feedback mechanisms and recognition of good work (through benefits, bonuses, promotions and raises). See other recommendations in Checklist 3 on gender-inclusive workplace practices (workplace culture).

  iv.   **Cultivate opportunities for professional development:** Creating opportunities for career advancement and job mobility is an important aspect of increasing women in decision-making roles. It is also beneficial for employee satisfaction, motivation and retention. Best practices include professional development programmes (upskilling and personal development plans for employees) and reviewing performance evaluations, appraisal and promotion-related decision-making policies, along with processes and tools, to ensure that they are gender-responsive and free from bias.

▶ **Walking the talk summary checklist**

☐   Work to achieve gender balance in your organization by addressing potential gender biases in recruitment and by developing an inclusive workplace.

☐   Provide gender-responsive professional development opportunities for your employees.

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21   Global Accelerator Learning Initiative, *Accelerating Women-led Startups: A Knowledge Brief*, 2020.

6
Measuring success

Systematic and consistent measurement of outcomes for tailored financial and business development services provision is necessary to determine when you are making quantifiable progress in your support to women entrepreneurs and if your services are having the intended results for the growth and success of their businesses.

Measurement begins with the selection of indicators and business metrics, which you may have considered in the Preparatory steps. Or they can be what is described further on in this section or selected from the list in Annex IV on sex-disaggregated metrics and indicators.

Make sure to consider these four steps to ensure an evidence-based and systematic monitoring of your progress.

i. **Collect sex-disaggregated data and ensure a gender-inclusive data collection.** Indicators and metrics should be sex-disaggregated by design (they identify respondents as men or women) to capture the impact of financial and business development service provision for women entrepreneurs and to differentiate between outcomes for men and women business owners.

   In addition to collecting sex-disaggregated data, you should be intentional about following a data-collection process that is gender-inclusive by design and in delivery. Checklist 4 on gender-inclusive impact measurement lists best practices that you can follow to ensure that your measurement is inclusive and effectively captures results from women.

> ▶ **Box 9. WE-Check in practice: Zamzam Somalia**
>
> With the support of the International Labour Organization, the Zamzam Foundation undertook a gender-sensitive assessment (the WE-Check process, described in box X) to improve their gender sensitivity and how they serve women entrepreneurs. Following this WE-Check process, Zamzam found that they could benefit from the creation of better systems and more gender-specific programming for women to participate fully in entrepreneurship activities. They launched a pilot project in April 2021 to test the feasibility of the recommendations from their assessment, including creating a centralized data management system to support the design of more effective and targeted programming for women entrepreneurs.
>
> Source: ILO, *Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check – WE-Check, An Assessment to Improve Service Provision to Women Entrepreneurs: Implementation Guide*, 2019.

ii. **Carefully select key performance indicators.** The selection of key performance indicators should be two-tiered: (a) allowing you to assess progress on your overall portfolio or programme-level goals and (b) measuring impact within individual businesses that you are supporting.

At the portfolio or programme level, you may want to track whether you are meeting your targets for the number of women-led businesses to be supported and measure aggregated portfolio or programme-level business outcomes for supported businesses led or owned by women. Other indicators are annexed in Annex IV on sex-disaggregated metrics and indicators.

At the individual business level, you should aim to track the financial or business development service outcomes as well as your own business' progress on gender inclusion in specific areas, for instance:

a. Impact on gender inclusion within your organization or workplace.

b. Impact on women and girls as clients and beneficiaries, as further detailed in Annex IV on sex-disaggregated metrics and indicators.

iii. **Implement feedback loops with women entrepreneurs.** To be truly inclusive, the impact measurement should look beyond quantitative metrics and incorporate qualitative insights and indicators, particularly from entrepreneurs themselves. By creating a standardized process for feedback collection, you will be able to improve your financial and business development services offerings in meaningful ways based on the needs and gaps articulated by women, which would then feed back into the design and delivery processes. Feedback loops can take the form of:

▶ pre-support interviews or surveys for expectation-setting,

▶ mid-programme surveys or one-on-one meetings to collect feedback on an ongoing basis, and

▶ end-of-programme (exit) interviews or surveys.

As a best practice, you could conduct follow-up interviews or surveys with participants every six months after the end of the engagement or whatever interval and length is appropriate in your context. These surveys and interviews can collect data that will feed into your impact measurement and continuous learning and adaptation process (described in the following section).

iv. **Systematize internal continuous learning and adaptation**. To ensure that these practices are permanently embedded into your organization's operational model, it is important to take steps to formalize receiving and incorporating feedback. You could provide training to all incoming and existing team members responsible for monitoring and evaluation, create formal systems for gender-inclusive data collection and tracking by incorporating best practices (see Checklist 4 on gender-inclusive impact measurement) and have gender focal points monitor progress at supported businesses.

▶ **Measuring success summary checklist**
☐ Collect sex-disaggregated data to track the impact of your new programmes with women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses.
☐ Select appropriate key performance indicators or metrics at the individual business level and across all of your clients and portfolio.
☐ Collect and internalize feedback from women entrepreneurs.
☐ Build learning and adaptation into your service provision and processes.

7

Next steps

This guide has given you a brief introduction to (a) the basics of gender inclusion, (b) steps and strategies for incorporating a gender lens into your product and service design and delivery, (c) support for measuring how effective these strategies are and (d) additional resources and programmes that you can use to continue your gender-inclusion work in the future.

After addressing some of the ways to improve gender inclusion in financial and business development services design and delivery, you can consider the following goals for continuing your work.

i. **Supporting the transition of informal businesses to registered MSMEs.** Women are often involved in the informal sector because of legal, financial, regulatory or other hurdles. While there is limited research on what policies help informal businesses to transition to formal ones, programmes that target informal businesses with financial products and business development service may reveal insights and improve the economic prospects for the informal sector.[22]

ii. **Enhancing the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women entrepreneurs**. Coordinated efforts to build an enabling environment policy framework, create an ecosystem conducive to business growth, shift gender norms and the disproportionate burden of domestic and care responsibilities on women and reduce or eliminate legal and regulatory burdens on MSMEs would all be constructive steps forward.[23]

iii. **Encouraging standardized gender data collection and sharing.** Lack of sex-disaggregated data on women entrepreneurs limits research and policy progress on women's empowerment and gender equality in the private sector. Collecting common gender metrics would make meaningful data analysis possible.

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22   Asian Development Bank and The Asia Foundation, *Emerging Lessons on Women's Entrepreneurship in Asia and the Pacific*, October 2018.

23   United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Enabling Environment for Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2013.

iv. **Deepening your implementation of a gender Lens.** From this starting point, you can embark on further steps using the following tools, scorecards and resources to deepen your engagement with gender inclusion.

   a. From the ILO: WE-Check Self-Assessment[24]

   b. Other scorecards, assessment and certifications: Women's Empowerment Principles,[25] Gender Smart Nexus[26] and EDGE[27]

▶ **Box 10. Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check (WE-Check)**

The International Labour Organization's Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check (WE-Check) supports public and private financial and non-financial service providers that seek to improve their processes, products and services for women entrepreneurs as a strategy to increase performance as well as reach scale and impact.

The WE-Check is a three-step change process that enables organizations providing services to small and medium-sized enterprises to carry out a gender self-assessment and identify needed improvements.

Step 1: Prepare assessment. Engage management, train an internal task team and develop a WE-Check plan.

Step 2: Carry out the assessment. Collect and analyse data. Develop a WE-Check action report and validate it with senior management.

Step 3: Take action and measure the change.

The WE-Check focuses on three areas: strategy and operations; clients and outreach; and products and services.

Source: ILO, *Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check – WE-Check, An Assessment to Improve Service Provision to Women Entrepreneurs: Implementation Guide*, 2019.

▶ **Box 11. Gender Smart Nexus platform**

Value for Women's Gender Smart Nexus is an accessible and automated public goods platform to help businesses, investors and intermediaries get introduced to what it means to apply a gender lens to their practice. Features of the Gender Smart Nexus:

An enterprise and gender lens investing gender assessment report: Automated gender assessment reports for each user type that demonstrate current gender practices, identify gaps and provide recommendations for improvement.

Portfolio and global benchmarks aligned with industry standards: Participants can take these surveys and get comparison reports (the enterprise takes the assessment survey every year and compares results to measure its progress). Investors and intermediaries can ask their portfolio companies to use the Nexus and receive aggregated portfolio reports. Benchmarks and metrics are aligned with the 2X Challenge and other industry standards (such as the Women's Empowerment Principles).

Source: See https://v4w.org/gendersmartnexus/.

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24 ILO, *Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check – WE-Check, An Assessment to Improve Service Provision to Women Entrepreneurs: Implementation Guide*, 2019.
25 WEPs Gender Gap Analysis Tool, https://weps-gapanalysis.org/about-the-weps/.
26 Value for Women, Gender Smart Nexus Self-Assessment, https://v4w.org/gendersmartnexus/.
27 EDGE Global Business Certification for Gender Equality, www.edge-cert.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/EDGE-Brochure-2016.pdf.

Annexes

I. Resources for more information on pursuing gender-inclusion strategies

Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2014. *Gender Tool Kit: Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Finance and Development*.

ADB and The Asia Foundation. 2018. *Emerging Lessons on Women's Entrepreneurship in Asia and the Pacific*.

Boston Consulting Group. 2009. *Women Want More in Financial Services*.

Global Banking Alliance for Women. 2017. The Economics of Banking on Women: Global Women's Market Survey.

International Finance Corporation. 2017. *MSME Finance Gap - Assessment of the Shortfalls and Opportunities in Financing Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Emerging Markets*.

International Finance Corporation (IFC). 2020. *IFC Guide to Training - Gender Supplement*.

International Labour Organization (ILO). 2014. *Effectiveness of Entrepreneurship Development Interventions on Women Entrepreneurs*.

ILO. 2018. *Entrepreneurship Development Interventions for Women Entrepreneurs: An Update on What Works*.

ILO. 2020. *Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check (WE-Check)*.

ILO. 2021. *Facilitating Peer and Technical Support Programmes to Women Entrepreneurs: A Manual*.

Value for Women. 2019. *A Business-First Approach to Gender Inclusion*.

Value for Women. 2020. *How to Invest with a Gender Lens: A Guide for Investors in Emerging Markets*.

Value for Women. 2021. *Pathways for Success: Women's Entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia: A Report Outlining What Women Social Entrepreneurs Need to Succeed*.

World Bank. 2019. *Profiting from Parity – Unlocking the Potential of Women's Businesses in Africa*.

World Bank Gender Innovation Lab. 2020. *GIL Top Policy Lessons on Empowering Women Entrepreneurs*.

World Bank Group. 2021. *Gender-Responsive Training Methods: A Guidance Note*.

II. Extended list of definitions and concepts

Business development services: A wide range of non-financial services used by entrepreneurs to help them to operate efficiently and develop their businesses. These services may include training, consultations, marketing and information resources that help enterprises gain access to additional services.[28] They are sometimes referred to as business support services, small enterprise advisory services or enterprise development.

Gender: Refers to the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for different groups of people (men and women). In addition to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations between women and those between men.[29]

Gender analysis: This term refers to a critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights and entitlements affect women, girls, men and boys in certain situations or contexts. Gender analysis examines the relationships between women and men and their access to and control of resources and the constraints they face relative to each other.[30]

Gender blind: This term refers to the failure to recognize that the roles and responsibilities of men and boys and women and girls are assigned to them in specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts and backgrounds. Projects, programmes, policies and attitudes that are gender blind do not take into account these different roles and diverse needs. They maintain the status quo and will not help transform the unequal structure of gender relations.[31]

Gender gap: A difference between women and men because of their gender. This does not refer to differences between individual women and men but rather differences that you can measure on average of entire populations through data analysis. For example, a gender gap in literacy (where men in most countries are more likely to be able to read than women) or a digital gender gap (where men in most countries are more likely than women to have smartphones and to use the internet). These differences exist because of gender norms and are an example of gender inequality.[32]

Gender-inclusive: This term refers to initiatives, activities or programmes that are open to both men and women but are designed to overcome any barriers to the full participation that one of the two sexes may experience. In most cases, it targets the increased participation of women and girls. Implementing gender-inclusive programmes is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias.[33]

Gender lens: A gender lens refers to the deliberate incorporation of gender factors in analysis, policies, practices and decision-making to improve social and business outcomes.[34]

Gender-neutral: Something that is not specific to women or men. This can be policies, investments, projects or business models, whereby it can be assumed that there is no different effect on women or men. Often, something is mistaken to be gender-neutral when it is "gender blind". This means that the policy, programme or business model did not take into account the ways in which it would affect women and men differently. In the end, gender-neutral most commonly means that the needs of men are assumed to be the needs of everyone, which leads to women's needs being left out.[35]

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28   Adapted definition from ILO Thesaurus, "business development service", https://metadata.ilo.org/thesaurus/-409091984.html.

29   Adapted from ILO, *Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check – WE-Check, An Assessment to Improve Service Provision to Women Entrepreneurs: Implementation Guide*, 2019.

30   International Labour Organization, *Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check – WE-Check, An Assessment to Improve Service Provision to Women Entrepreneurs: Implementation Guide*, 2019.

31   ibid.

32   Adapted from Value for Women, "Gender Inclusion for Innovators- Facilitators Guide" (internal brief).

33   Adapted from International Finance Corporation, Guide to Training Gender Supplement, 2020.

34   Value for Women, How to Invest with a Gender Lens, 2020.

35   Adapted from Value for Women, *Gender Inclusion for Innovators – Facilitators Guide*, 2018.

Gender norms (also gender roles): Commonly accepted characteristics of women's and men's identity tied to their gender. Gender norms are ideas about how men and women should be and act. We often learn gender norms early in life and end up behaving according to them without really considering them later on. This can seriously limit the choices people have in life. An example of a gender norm is "women care for the home, men go to work to earn income for the family". Gender norms can differ over time and across countries, cultures, religions and even communities.

Gender stereotypes: This is a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by or performed by women and men. A gender stereotype is harmful when it limits women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and/ or make choices about their lives. Whether overtly hostile (such as "women are irrational") or seemingly benign ("women are nurturing"), harmful stereotypes perpetuate inequalities. For example, the traditional view of women as caregivers means that childcare responsibilities often fall exclusively on women. Further, gender stereotypes compounded and intersecting with other stereotypes have a disproportionate negative impact on certain groups of women, such as women from minority or indigenous groups, women with disabilities, women from lower caste groups or with lower economic status or migrant women.[36]

Sex: The physical and biological characteristics that distinguish males and females.[37]

Sex-disaggregated data: This is data that are cross-classified by sex or gender, presenting information separately for men and women, boys and girls. Sex-disaggregated data reflect roles, real situations and general conditions of women and men, girls and boys in every aspect of society, such as the literacy rate, education levels, business ownership, employment, wage differences, dependants, house and land ownership, loans and credit and debts. When data are not disaggregated by sex, it is more difficult to identify inequalities. Sex-disaggregated data are necessary for effective gender analysis.[38]

Women's empowerment: The process by which women become aware of the culture in which they live and identify and carry out actions to overcome any disadvantages or barriers to their full participation that may arise from that culture. These actions can range from strengthening women's self-respect and self-image to promoting greater parliamentary representation of women to assisting women in starting or improving their own businesses.[39]

Women-led business: A business that is at least 25 per cent owned by one woman or more, whose management and control lie with one woman or more, which has at least one third of the board of directors composed of women (where a board exists), where a woman is a signatory of the business's legal documents and financial accounts and which is operated independently from businesses that are neither led nor owned by women.[40] For the purposes of this document, we consider "women-led businesses" to include all "women-owned businesses".

Women-owned business: A business that is more than 50 per cent owned by one woman or more, whose management and control lie with one woman or more, where a woman is a signatory of the business's legal documents and financial accounts and which is operated independently from businesses that are not owned by women.[41]

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36   Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgs/pages/genderstereotypes.aspx.
37   ILO, *Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check – WE-Check, An Assessment to Improve Service Provision to Women Entrepreneurs: Implementation Guide*, 2019.
38   ibid.
39   ibid.
40   Different organizations have definitions and thresholds for women-led businesses (at least 51 per cent of the company is owned by a woman or multiple women) depending on their context and the purpose of the definition. For this guide, we use the definition from ISO IWA34 ISO – IWA 34:2021 - Women's entrepreneurship – Key definitions and general criteria.
41   Your internal definitions of women-owned business may vary (as with women-led business).

III. Detailed checklists

Checklist 1. Gender-inclusive communications

▶ **Written communications**

☐ Use gender-neutral pronouns (they and them) or an intentional balance of pronouns when not referring to a specific individual.

☐ Ensure that both women and men (as well as women-led and men-led businesses) are represented in examples, case studies and materials and that both men and women are quoted as experts and authorities.

☐ Avoid describing women and men in a way that reinforces gender stereotypes.

☐ Craft your message to represent women as agents of change and avoid language that portrays women as passive recipients of aid or as victims.

☐ Depict women and men actively participating in diverse aspects of public and private life (at home, school, the workplace, in public and family life and in the community) and be mindful of people's many complementary identities at work and in the home.

☐ Share real examples of women-led businesses and women entrepreneurs to give participants the chance to relate to them and their situation.

▶ **Audiovisual representation**

☐ Choose images that show women and men in non-traditional and non-stereotypical roles and professions and show women in positions of power and authority as the norm and not an exception.

☐ Ensure at least proportionate numbers of women and men in your image selection.

☐ Consider posture, expressions, gestures, positioning and clothing within a picture or image to convey balance, equal status and authority. For example, avoid portraying a man explaining something to a women-only group.

☐ Try not to reinforce traditional or dominant ideologies of beauty – focus on the roles of the people in the images and a variety of representative appearances.

☐ Include representations of intersectional marginalization (disability, citizenship, visa status, first language, race, sexuality, etc.).

☐ Include alt-text,[42] captions and image descriptions to make audiovisual materials more understandable and accessible.

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42   Alt-text or alternative text, (also alt tags or alt descriptions) is the written copy that appears in place of an image on a webpage that describes what is in the image. Alt text is used if the image fails to load, if screen-reading tools are used to aid visually impaired readers, and allows search engines to better crawl and rank your website. From HubSpot, "Image Alt Text: What It Is, How to Write It, and Why It Matters to SEO" by Braden Becker, 12 July 2021, https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/image-alt-text.

Checklist 2. Gender-inclusive service provision

▶ Design

☐ **Conduct a needs assessment**. Using any or a combination of the qualitative and quantitative methodologies, research what are the challenges and barriers that women face in starting, managing and growing their businesses and accessing the resources they need to succeed.

☐ **Adapt to learning styles and technical backgrounds**. Consider the different backgrounds, learning styles and education of participants, and tailor the training according to the audience. (Don't forget to ask about language ability and digital literacy!)

☐ **Be flexible and sensitive.** Work with participants to determine any factors that stand in the way of women's participation (inadequate child care, limited transportation options) and identify windows of availability and other ways to address these barriers.

☐ **Make it a safe and inclusive space.** Create an environment in which people feel comfortable expressing their opinions. Introduce the three aspects of active listening – listening without knowing, without judgement and without interruption.

▶ Delivery

☐ **Ensure services are delivered by both women and men.** Prior to delivering services, consider whether it would have possible repercussions if only men were providing the offered service to your clients. If so, consider as a minimum to have mixed facilitators, with both women and men acting as facilitators, trainers, counsellors or mentors.

☐ **Encourage participation from everyone.** Send the agenda prior to a meeting so that everyone can prepare as per their personal preferences. Set the stage for broad participation, by asking all participants – women and men – to participate in a way that suits the format of the activity. In settings in which women or another group are the minority, pay attention to these participants and ensure they feel included. Offer support, taking into account that some women or other groups may have had less experience speaking in public forums.

☐ **Celebrate differences.** Where possible, encourage working groups with people from diverse genders and backgrounds to ensure a variety of perspectives and experiences.

☐ **Be conscious of voice and power dynamics.** Notice the people who are silent in the room and ensure that you include them, and create space for a variety of voices and people. When brainstorming or asking for feedback, use inclusive methods, such as listening circles or rotating assigned roles to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak, take notes, etc. In virtual activities, ensure broader participation by asking people to provide inputs both verbally and in written form, such as in the chat.

☐ **Clarify rules and expectations.** At the beginning of the session, establish rules about the consequences for the use of stereotypes, discriminatory language or inappropriate jokes, and respond quickly and decisively to address these situations if one arises during a session.

☐ **Conduct post-tests or collect feedback.** To gather feedback from participants on how they perceived the training, it could be helpful to do a short post-test or send out a feedback survey. This can collect information on whether they found it inclusive or any challenges with the facilitation, activities, accessibility or timing. The data collected should be sex-disaggregated.

☐ **Debrief with facilitators.** It is recommended that facilitators institutionalize discussing among themselves the learnings, highlights and any related actions from the conducted activity, including related to gender inclusivity. Eventually share this with leadership to ensure continuous learning and improvement.

Checklist 3. Gender-inclusive workplace practices

▶ Recruitment

☐ Advertise the salary, flexibility and benefits to help address gender-based salary disparities.

☐ Use gender-inclusive language in job announcements and descriptions.

☐ Consider carefully the required skills versus preferred skills, keeping in mind that women and minority groups may have less experience.

☐ Include an equal opportunities employer statement.

☐ Emphasize that the company values gender diversity and inclusion.

☐ Set targets with recruiters related to total number of women applicants, use of women-focused networks and number of women candidates to be shortlisted (as appropriate).

☐ Build relationships with local women's groups, professional groups and networks to expand the pool of women applicants.

☐ Create a detailed job criteria screening checklist, and train hiring staff on it to ensure consistent evaluation of candidates and to reduce bias in shortlisting and selection.

☐ Consider taking all hiring managers through unconscious bias training.

▶ Workplace culture

☐ **Promote active listening:** Active listening comprises three components: listening without knowing, listening without judgement and listening without interruption.

☐ **Make gender inclusivity policies and practices readily available:** Notice boards, the intranet or other internal communications platforms are good ways to create a section for employees to access them.

☐ **Provide and communicate leadership development and mentorship programmes:** Share information about leadership development and mentorship programmes, including those targeting women specifically. Make these available to staff by providing funding, subsidies and/or leave time to facilitate greater participation.

☐ **Use an inclusive approach with pronouns:** Avoid gender-specific pronouns except when referring to a specific person. Use the "they" or "them" or intentionally use diverse pronouns.

☐ **Intentionally celebrate men and women with unconventional personalities and styles as leaders:** Give equal visibility to women and men occupying decision-making and leadership positions as role models.

☐ **Create pathways for feedback:** Ensure that there are integrated feedback mechanisms and accountability for actions. It may be appropriate to allow feedback to be submitted anonymously.

☐ **Be conscious of voice:** Notice those people who are silent in the room and ensure that you include them and do not continually hear the same voices. When brainstorming or asking for feedback, use inclusive methods, such as listening circles to ensure everyone speaks.

☐ Use uplifting, inclusive and non-discriminatory language and behaviour.

☐ **Be brave:** Respectfully call out behaviour that is not in line with the company's inclusive way of working.

☐ **Collect data.** Administer and act upon organizational culture surveys regularly. Examples of the questions the company can include to collect the staff feedback are: What are the top three things you value most about your company? What are the top three things you'd like to improve about your company? To the extent possible, data should be sex-disaggregated.

☐ **Authentically commit and be accountable.** Leaders should articulate an authentic commitment to diversity, challenge the status quo, hold others accountable and make diversity and inclusion a personal priority.

☐ **Be conscious of your own biases.** Leaders should be aware of their biases as well as flaws in the company system, and work hard to ensure a meritocracy.

☐ **Track and monitor sex-disaggregated metrics** to ensure both women and men are benefiting equitably from professional development opportunities at your company.

Checklist 4. Gender-inclusive impact measurement

▶ **Designing impact metrics and identifying indicators**

☐ Keep the list of gender metrics and indicators lean to ensure that the metrics are easy to track and report on for businesses.

☐ Use both quantitative and qualitative data together to create a well-rounded picture of your business' performance with regards to providing gender-inclusive services and engaging with women-led businesses.

☐ Capture longitudinal data to assess your business performance or impact over time (through multiple and consecutive research activities over time).

▶ **Data collection**

☐ **Timing:** Schedule a time that does not interfere with the target women demographic's personal and professional responsibilities. If data collection is to take place away from the women's home, schedule around child care or offer it.

☐ **Location:** Data collection ideally takes place at or within close proximity of each women's home, such as within walking distance or accessible via safe and quick transportation. If transportation is required, consider organizing transport and/or provide a stipend to cover any associated cost. Data collectors should also be ready to present proof of why they are coming before or during the visit to limit any suspicions from family and others.

☐ **Technology:** If data collection is to happen via a device, ensure that women in your target demographic have access. Given technology gaps in many countries, it is important that women possess the technical skills to respond to the survey and, if not, that support and/or accompaniment is provided.

☐ **Health and safety:** Health and safety protocols should apply to any data collection method that involves travel or exposure to individuals outside of the women's home, particularly during these COVID-19 pandemic times.

☐ **Women data collectors:** In some contexts, women are more comfortable freely sharing their perspectives with other women, particularly women of similar backgrounds and/or from the same or nearby communities, especially if data collection happens near or in the home. Alternatively, men who are collecting data should be trained in gender-inclusive communication and service delivery.

☐ **Clear research purpose, data usage and confidentiality:** Promoting trust is key and sometimes particularly important for women. Data collectors should explain the purpose of the research, how data will be used and whether or not participants can expect benefits from the research. This includes being clear about confidentiality.

☐ **Sensitive wording of questions:** If questions delve into personal or sensitive matters, ideally these would be asked in one-on-one rather than group settings and will use non-judgemental language with appropriate answer options.

☐ **Steering clear of jargon:** Questions are more likely to elicit complete responses if they are clearly worded, free of jargon and in the respondents' first language. Testing the data collection tools with a small sample of respondents before rolling them out might be useful to eliminate any unclear jargon or formulation.

☐ **Creating all-women spaces:** In group research settings, such as focus groups, you may want to create all-women spaces. For example, if local cultural norms preclude women from fully expressing themselves with men in attendance and an all-women space could enable women to be more comfortable expressing their opinions.

☐ **Ground rules**: For group contexts such as focus groups, the data collector will need to invite everyone's participation, and in a mixed group of both women and men, establish ground rules and expectations for everyone's participation. This includes potentially going around the room and having people share their opinions rather than relying exclusively on spontaneous responses.

IV. Sex-disaggregated metrics and indicators

Financial and business development services portfolio and programme outcomes

Indicators	Sample metrics
▶ There are more women-led businesses applying for and receiving financial or business development service assistance from your organization. ▶ More women-led businesses are able to access finance. ▶ Women-led businesses are able to secure larger ticket sizes for investments. ▶ Women-led businesses improve their business performance and operational efficiencies.	▶ No. of women-led applicants for financial or business development service support. ▶ No. of women-led businesses that go through due diligence. ▶ No. of women-led businesses that are selected for financial or business development service support. ▶ No. of women-led businesses that are able to access finance (fundraising success by type – debt, equity, grant, donation, etc.). ▶ Average ticket size of investments and loans secured by women-led businesses. ▶ No. of new products and services (innovation and product diversification). ▶ Revenue growth. ▶ No. of jobs created (company and staff growth). ▶ Market expansion or footprint. ▶ Operating expenses. ▶ Customer or client satisfaction (net promoter score).

Internal outcomes for individual providers

Indicators: Workforce	Sample metrics: Workforce
▶ There is a balanced number of men and women at each level of the organization. ▶ Men and women employees feel equally empowered. ▶ Men and women employees feel equally safe. ▶ Men and women know what do when safety boundaries have been crossed.	▶ No. of full-time employees, by sex. ▶ No. of part-time employees, by sex. ▶ No. of consulting trainers, coaches and mentors, by sex. ▶ No. of occasional or seasonal workers, by sex. ▶ No. of managers, by sex. ▶ No. of board directors, by sex (if relevant). ▶ No. of candidates shortlisted and interviewed and offers given, by sex. ▶ No. of promotions, turnover and terminated contracts, by sex. ▶ Average annual salary for employees at each level or role, by sex. ▶ Average annual salary for management positions, by sex. ▶ No. of incidents related to discrimination, by sex. ▶ No. of addressed incidents related to discrimination, by sex. ▶ No. of human resources policies and practices that go beyond compliance with local laws (maternity or paternity leave beyond national regulatory requirements).

▶ Gender-inclusive service provision: A quick guide for financial and business development services providers

This guide is designed to help providers of financial and business development services to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises be more gender-inclusive in their work, particularly to improve service delivery to women entrepreneurs. The guide presents benefits of adopting a gender lens to target women entrepreneurs and women-led businesses and to tailor products and service delivery to them. It offers step-by-step guidance for how to begin to incorporate gender-inclusive strategies into content and delivery of services as well assist in setting the foundation for better overall impact and effectiveness.

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