
Addressing gender considerations in the soy supply chain: tackling gender inequality through responsible sourcing

Soy Toolkit
Discussion Paper
on Gender



Version 1.2



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5-element approach



Figure 1: The 5-element approach for sourcing soy responsibly

Key Points

- There remains a wide gender gap between men and women in terms of the benefits received from participating in agricultural supply chains, including in soy.
- Companies should address gender issues both in their internal operations and those of their third-party suppliers. Gender considerations must be incorporated at different stages of the approach to responsible sourcing.
- Company sourcing policies that do not actively contribute to gender equality are likely to reinforce a system that marginalises some for the benefit of others.
- Companies sourcing soy can contribute to improving gender equality in agriculture by promoting this through their commitments and policies, and actively engaging with suppliers to tackle gender inequality in production.

Purpose of this Discussion Paper

This discussion paper is part of the 'Responsible Sourcing Soy Toolkit'¹. It provides rationale and recommendations for including gender considerations in the responsible sourcing of soy and ensuring gender equality is built in to all stages of the supply chain, including production. This paper outlines key steps soy sourcing companies can take at different levels of the approach to implement their policies. There are ongoing discussions across a set of commodity supply chains on how to address gender inequalities, and this paper is an attempt to help the conversations move forward. It can and will be reviewed as the sectors progress.

Why is gender equality important in the sourcing of soy?

Globally, women make up around 48% of the agricultural workforce². For the remaining 52% of the workforce comprised of men, it is likely that there is a highly correlated number of women providing unpaid tasks (e.g. housework, childcare) that support men's work. However, there remains a wide gender gap in terms of the benefits received from participating in agricultural supply chains. Although both men and women face challenges in these supply chains, it is well recognised that women are disproportionately affected by discriminatory attitudes, behaviours, norms and specific roles assigned to them in society which prevent them from having the same access to and control of resources as men, fewer opportunities, and less voice in decision-making. Women can face a number of barriers and constraints when working in agricultural production and processing. These include:

- **lack of equal opportunity to acquire the factors of production** such as land, credit, networks, infrastructure and education;
- **lack of time** to take advantage of economic incentives (e.g. by participating in agricultural development projects) due to women's existing roles and responsibilities for carrying out unpaid tasks (e.g. child care, housework) - also referred to as the unpaid care economy;
- **discriminatory gender norms prevalent in communities, markets and institutional structures** which favour male participation and prevent women from having an equal voice in decision-making.

Globally, entrenched gender norms continue to affect women in supply chains in terms of their right to own land, their participation in trade unions, discrimination over pay and progression to more senior roles and the threat of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace³. These issues affect women in all commodity supply chains, however there are concerns unique to every commodity and geography that can be addressed through context-specific interventions. The case of Brazilian soy is considered here.

In Brazil, one of the largest soy producing countries, women make up 10% of the labour force in the national soy sector⁴, but continue to earn approximately a quarter less of men's earnings, and dedicate close to 75% more time to domestic and care work than men⁵. Furthermore, less than 15% of all land in Brazil is registered to women and women make up the majority of the 15 million landless people in Brazil⁶.

Agricultural companies are in a powerful position to address these inequities and should do so, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it is the law and it is usually part of soy buying companies' broader human rights policies. Business leaders should consider how their operations affect women and men differently in terms of the opportunities and barriers that they face to ensure that both benefit equally from participation in the supply chain.

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Many companies have already committed to this in their internal and responsible sourcing policies by including issues such as equal pay and prevention of harassment and discrimination. This reflects an adherence to international conventions (e.g. the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women). Many of these requirements around women's rights and gender equality have also been translated into national legislation which must also be respected regardless of the level of enforcement in the country. **This is the case in Brazil which has laws prohibiting gender discrimination in pay, professional training, and career advancement**, but which are enforced to varying levels⁷.

Companies can go further with incentives to promote gender equality as part of following good practices in supply chains beyond their own operations. For example, fostering gender equality and women's empowerment is one of the key principles of the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems put forward by the FAO⁸. By enforcing gender equality from suppliers, under their commitments to respecting human rights, companies can contribute to improving overall rural livelihoods in the countries and communities they source from as well as possibly increasing production yields.

Implementing these gender sensitive commitments and practices in the supply chain also makes good business sense, as it has been found that **giving women the same access as men to agricultural resources could increase production on women's farms in developing countries by 20 to 30 percent**⁹. Furthermore, this can be an effective risk-mitigation strategy for companies to **prevent reputational damage as gender equality is becoming increasingly recognised as important by consumers**.

According to the United Nations, a gendered approach to commodity supply chains directly contributes to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) GOAL 5. This SDG aims to 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', and also has the potential to contribute to eight other SDGs:

GOAL 1: End poverty

GOAL 2: End hunger

GOAL 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

GOAL 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education

GOAL 8: Promote economic growth, employment and decent work for all

GOAL 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

GOAL 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

GOAL 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems

Source: United Nations Development Programme. Gender mainstreaming in global agricultural supply chains can accelerate good growth: What works and for whom? UNDP, 2019.

<https://goodgrowthpartnership.com/wp-content/uploads/Gender-KP-Final-Jan2020.pdf>

Key steps, tools and approaches for addressing gender issues in the sourcing of soy

01 Develop gender sensitive commitments, policies and implementation plans

Commitments

The first step for a company wanting to tackle gender inequality in its supply chain is to commit to gender equality at the highest level. This ensures that all the stakeholders working within and with the company are clear on the company's standpoint and are empowered to take action where necessary. These high-level commitments should be well publicised and communicated amongst staff and suppliers and can take on the form of a set goal of achieving gender equality or a call to action for tackling gender inequality (see examples in **Box 1**).

Box 1. Examples of gender commitments and/or goals made by soy sourcing companies

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Unilever “We want to help create a world in which every woman and girl can create the kind of life she wishes to lead, unconstrained by harmful norms and stereotypes. We believe a world where women are economically empowered will be a fairer, happier and more prosperous place to live – and that our business will flourish in it. By 2020 we will empower 5 million women.”

Unilever Sustainable Living Plan¹⁰

Mars “Our goal is to unlock opportunities for women in our workplaces, marketplaces and supply chain”

Sustainable in a Generation Plan¹¹

Nestlé “Our commitment: Enhance gender balance in our workforce and empower women across the entire value chain.” includes objectives such as improving the livelihoods of women in five priority sourcing locations by 2020

Nestlé Gender Balance¹²

Commitments should also be elaborated on with a more detailed action plan as to how the commitment or goal will be achieved to avoid broad generalisations that make them difficult to understand or implement. As women interact with the supply chain in different roles, strategies should be developed to ensure equality of different roles as well. For example, Mars divides their work on gender equality into approaches to address their workplace, the marketplace, and supply chains. Unilever elaborate on their approach even more, by specifically identifying interventions to address challenging harmful gender norms, advancing diversity and inclusion, promoting safety for women, enhancing women's access to training and skills, enhancing life skills and entrepreneurship, and expanding opportunities in the retail value chain¹³.

Policies

Commitments should then be operationalised through a set of more detailed policies on how gender equality will be embedded at all stages of the supply chain.

Policies should:

- 1. Cover internal operations and third-party suppliers** by including gender equality considerations in responsible sourcing policies. Although many companies have developed internal gender guidelines for their staff, this is not always applied or specifically made applicable to their suppliers. If the company is a trader or refiner, it should ensure that both its internal operations and those of the producers it buys from ensure gender sensitivity. Buyers further downstream in the supply chain should in turn source from suppliers that have gender equality considerations in their responsible sourcing policies.
- 2. Specifically address women.** Existing policies should be reviewed with a 'gender lens'. At a basic level, this can include reviewing instances where policies refer to workers or communities and changing this to "men and women workers or community members". Changing the language in this way can be an important first step in making people realise the differences that exist and the need to tackle inequalities.
- 3. Set clear statements for vulnerable people throughout the supply chain, such as rural workers.** Including local communities in commitments is also important for women's inclusion as women are often not directly working within the soy supply chain, but are creating the enabling conditions for men to work within it. A company can seek to provide women with opportunities even out of the soy value chain, as a way to minimise gender inequalities. Companies who are closer to production, such as those owning or buying directly from silos and/or plantations, have more leverage and power to make changes on the ground and should develop more operational policies which can be implemented directly.

Box 2. Possible policy requirements to ensure gender equality in responsible sourcing

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- Provide equal opportunities for decent work without gender discrimination or intimidation.
- Ensure equal pay between men and women and equal opportunities among all staff, including senior positions.
- Prevent sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse in the workplace from taking place and have clear systems and processes to deal with cases when they happen.
- Ensure family-friendly practices in the workplace, including ensuring the safety of pregnant women, the right to take maternity leave without losing their job or having their pay reduced when they return to work as well as ensuring the right to paternity leave for fathers.
- Ensure both men and women are consulted during consultation processes with affected communities.
- Ensure the respect of women's land rights by considering how women's access to land and its resources or land ownership will be affected during any land acquisitions or projects with local communities.

In all cases, companies should start this process by reviewing the policies and commitments they already have and assessing if they capture gender issues. Once the gaps have been identified companies can revise the policies to make them gender sensitive. This exercise should be conducted for all policies as gender differences are present in many topics which may be covered by a variety of policies, e.g. wages, recruitment practices, safety at work, work benefits, freedom of association, land rights, grievance mechanisms, etc.

Implementation plans

Implementation plans are important for translating policies into action and delivering on environmental and social commitments.

When developing these plans, it is important to consider the specific social context as gender issues and norms will vary from region to region, affecting women and men differently. If not properly addressed, this could lead to one group (usually women) being excluded from initiatives meant to help them or even being negatively impacted by these initiatives (see **Box 3** for an example).

General good practices for developing an implementation plan include:

- Enlisting the support of a local (or international) organisation with expertise in promoting and implementing women's rights and gender equality in the country or region.
- Developing gender sensitive Key Performance Indicators and collecting sex-disaggregated data to ensure progress is being achieved for both men and women.
- Explore the role of unpaid work within the company and its supply chain.
- Establishing a time-bound road map for meeting the specific KPIs

Oxfam, Unilever and Unilever's laundry brand, Surf, are working together to address unpaid care work. The three-year WE-Care partnership is the first of its kind, aiming to recognise, reduce and redistribute the amount of time spent by women and girls on unpaid care work in the Philippines and Zimbabwe.

They have joined forces to share complementary learning and insights gleaned from working on unpaid care and domestic work with communities and consumers around the world, and with businesses and brands to share emerging good practice and evidence.

Source: https://www.unilever.com/Images/web_business_briefing_v7_tcm244-537490_en.pdf

Implementation should include continuous learning through activities such as internal training and mentoring, so that company staff can reflect on gender equality issues, both in terms of the work the company is doing but also personally. This process of reflection on discriminatory gender norms, on the work of the company and how it impacts women and men differently, and what this means for their corporate culture and brand, can help staff understand the rationale behind this work and how to start putting it in place both internally and with their suppliers.

Box 3. Example case of how implementation plans can negatively impact women

Company A wants to provide equal opportunities for women to work in its soy supply chain. It therefore implements an initiative promoting the hiring of more women to work in its soy crushing mills (or its supplier's mills) and ensures that women are to be hired on the same contracts as men, paid the same wage, and protected from workplace harassment.

However, the company did not consult the women on their interests, their concerns and their current roles/responsibilities, etc. Due to discriminatory gender norms within the workers' cultural context, women are expected to perform all the household tasks, from cleaning to taking care of children, and cultivating crops for personal consumption. The company was also unaware of stories of sexual harassment from the exclusively male supervisors that they would be working with.

Consequently, although they were interested in employment, women were slow to take up the offer, because without flexible hours, shorter shifts and/or childcare facilities, the terms of the job were unfavourable to them. As a result of few women accepting the offer of employment, the company assumed there was no interest from women in working for them.

This could have been prevented by consulting with local women and organisations to help local women shape the initiative, thereby increasing its chance of success.

02 Include gender issues in risk assessment

As part of the process to assess risks in its supply base (element 2 of the 5-element approach to responsible sourcing), a soy buying company with a gender policy should also look at its suppliers' policies and evaluate how well they address gender discrimination and protection.

This step can be incorporated into existing risk assessment and supplier performance verification systems by, for example, verifying the gender ratios of staff, particularly at senior levels, and whether they are receiving equal salaries, and/or checking if any grievances have been brought up against the supplier around gender issues such as sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. Discrimination is not always obvious and can be hidden in certain practices. For example, women may only be allocated to less fertile fields or may only receive temporary contracts. Checking repeatedly over time can reveal persistent issues or trends and identify how and where discrimination and harassment is liable to occur in the supply chain¹⁴. This information can then be used to monitor improvements and/or problem areas that need addressing.

This should be complemented by an assessment of women's rights and gender equality issues in the suppliers' geographies. This information can be gathered through a wide range of publicly available tools as well as more targeted research on specific suppliers (see **Box 4** for some resources). Some example data points to consider in an assessment are the ratio between men and women's involvement in unions, industry bodies and civil society organisations as well as gender dynamics and legislation in the area and how these may affect equality. The gender analysis data gathered should then be combined with other risk indicators to determine which suppliers should be targeted for engagement to address these concerns based on their risk profile. After running a risk assessment, the implementation plan should always be reviewed incorporating insights from the assessment.

Forest 500's assessment includes specific indicators for company commitments on gender, both with respect to labour rights, and on inclusion of women in supply chains on equal terms. It can be used to analyse the risk associated with the suppliers of a company.

Source: <https://forest500.org/rankings/companies>

03 Engage suppliers on gender equality issues

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Box 4. Gender data and analysis resources

- Gender Development Index - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-development-index-gdi>
- World Bank Gender Data Portal - <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/>
- Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) - <https://www.genderindex.org>
- FAO's Gender and Land Rights database - <http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/en/>
- International Land Coalition's Learning Hub - <http://www.landcoalition.org/learn>
- CEDAW government reports - <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm> and accompanying NGO shadow reports

Including gender considerations during supplier engagement activities

To ensure gender inequality is properly addressed, gender issues should be considered at all stages of the engagement process. This also means ensuring the engagement process itself is gender sensitive, as explained further here:

Before engaging with suppliers, soy buying companies can take the following steps to ensure their approach is gender sensitive:

- Conduct a desktop risk analysis using the tools and techniques described in Section 2.
- Collect additional information to understand gender issues in the specific area where their high-risk suppliers are located, including the roles and responsibilities of the men and women in the local context, their access to and control of resources, discriminatory gender norms that may inhibit participation or benefits from participation in the supply chain and identify root causes for any inequality. This may require interviews or focus groups of a representative population of your suppliers' workers, so you can understand the issues relevant to their specific circumstances (see **Box 5** for key topics and sample questions).
- Incorporate the information gathered on gender equality considerations into your supplier engagement plans, such as the topics you plan to discuss with management or the aspects of the work that you ask to see first-hand.

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Box 5. Key Topics and Questions for a Gender Analysis

A simple gender analysis can consist of systematically asking questions about differences between men and women in a given population, especially regarding:

- Roles and activities, e.g. Who does what? When? How? What value is given to these different roles?
- Resources and Constraints, e.g. Who owns/controls the resources? Who makes what decisions?
- Benefits and incentives, e.g. Who controls the activities? Who benefits? Who receives income? / non-income incentives?

For more information on this, please see *A practical guide to mainstreaming gender analysis in value chain development*, from the International Labor Organization (ILO), available at: https://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_106538/lang--en/index.htm

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During a supplier visit, meeting, or other type of engagement, it is important to think about gender equality concerns and ensure that your engagement addresses rather than exacerbates or ignores any issues:

- Where relevant and appropriate, potential gender issues identified during risk assessment or pre-engagement interviews should be brought up during meetings with suppliers at management level, for example, by asking for information on how gender issues are addressed and how sex disaggregated data on workers is captured and analysed. Ensure that women in management positions are included in these supplier engagement meetings.
- If the engagement involves a site visit or assessment on supplier sustainability performance, ensure (if there is room for it) this is prepared and carried out in a way that will capture gender inequalities (see **Box 6**).
- Ensure any consultation processes with suppliers, workers, local people and other stakeholders allows for the meaningful participation of both men and women¹⁵.
- Make sure to include both men and women in any capacity building activities and ensure that these directly address gender issues (may require separate sessions for men and women), while at the same time being sensitive to cultural norms.
- It is recommended that the topic of women's rights and gender equality not be addressed as a standalone activity but should be incorporated into multiple activities and sessions on different topics in a workshop or training programme, to help people to absorb new information in different ways.
- If necessary, assist the supplier in developing gender sensitive policies of their own and make sure these are communicated with all staff and other stakeholders and that appropriate training and support is put into place.

After direct engagements with a supplier, ensure the issues uncovered and discussed are properly addressed going forward, and any action plans or activities on improving gender equality are being implemented:

- Make sure to consider gender equality issues when monitoring supplier progress (see section 5).
- Ensure women are consulted specifically when organising any follow-up activities or verification
- Plan for follow-up visits and continuous improvement plans if gender issues are found.



Box 6. Ensuring gender equality in site visits/assessments

A number of steps should be taken before, during and after site visits or assessments of producers to ensure gender issues are captured. These include:

- If working with a hired organisation to conduct the visit, ensure this organisation is aware of gender issues and also specifically asked to look into gender issues during the visit. Preferably, hire a team that already has experience in facilitating discussions around gender equality issues in the field.
- Ensure that the interview sample of workers and local community members include both men and women, and consider how gender will affect the answers given and possibly mask problems. You may need to hold separate focus group discussions with women and men. Ensure that you can signpost to existing social and support services for women or girls experiencing violence (and ideally men) in case this is revealed by workers during the interview.
- Talk to existing women's groups (if present in the area) and seek to understand women's roles in the society and how this will affect their experience in the production process.
- Look beyond just gender-based harassment and discrimination and investigate if and how men and women experience difference in other aspects such as in the impacts of production on environmental services.
- Ensure there are safeguards for both the men and women conducting the fieldwork.
- Demand findings which are disaggregated by sex and adequately show how issues identified affect men and women differently.

For more information on this, please see *A practical guide to mainstreaming gender analysis in value chain development*, from the International Labor Organization (ILO), available at: https://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_106538/lang--en/index.htm

Although supplier engagement activities should be carried out by all soy buying companies in the supply chain, companies further from the site of production, such as international retailers and feed and food industries, may have to take a more indirect approach than traders, crushers and other companies that are buying soy directly. This can be accomplished by working with direct suppliers to cascade gender equality requirements up the supply chain to producers as well as helping to instil a culture of gender equality within the supplier's own operations and management. Companies can also carry out gender analysis on their suppliers and their supply chains and support and/or finance gender training for their suppliers and the producers they buy from (see **Box 7** for example in the cocoa sector).

Box 7. Mondelez empowering women smallholders in their global cocoa supply chain

Mondelez recognised that its long-term supply of cocoa as a raw material was endangered because the cocoa yield from its supply farms was shrinking, and cocoa farming was seen as an undesirable career. Studies showed the situation of women was an important aspect in the sustainability of the sector, as women in production countries earn significantly less than men, have less land for cultivation and produce smaller yields. Moreover, they are provided with fewer opportunities to build technical knowledge of cocoa cultivation and are under-represented in local decision-making processes and leadership.

Therefore, in 2012, Mondelez initiated the Cocoa Life programme, which aims to bring about lasting empowerment of 200,000 cocoa farmers in six countries and reach one million people in the cultivation regions by 2022 through an investment of USD 400 million. Under the programme, they aim to include women by explicitly inviting them and giving them access to training courses covering efficient cultivation techniques, financial knowledge and management methods. 'Train the trainer' programmes enable women to help each other and act as role models for other women in the cocoa supply chain. Furthermore, to increase women's involvement in decision-making processes in the community, the programme aims to increase women's membership of cocoa cooperatives, and to have more input into the design of Community Action Plans, by which local communities plan for cocoa farming and local development in general.

Although traditional gender roles are only changing slowly, women have already achieved initial successes in land ownership and independent cocoa cultivation. Mondelez measures the success of the programme annually by taking separate measurements for women and men of indicators such as income and productivity.

Source: <https://ir.mondelezinternational.com/news-releases/news-release-details/mondelez-international-expands-womens-empowerment-plans-cocoa>

04 Monitor and verify progress on gender equality issues

In order to ensure long-term impact, soy buyers should continue to verify and monitor progress of their suppliers as well as internal operations in a way that flags any differences (positive or negative) in how men and women are being affected by soy production, processing, or the company processes and culture at any stage of the supply chain. This can be done by developing gender sensitive Key Performance Indicators and disaggregating progress data by sex wherever possible¹⁶. For example:

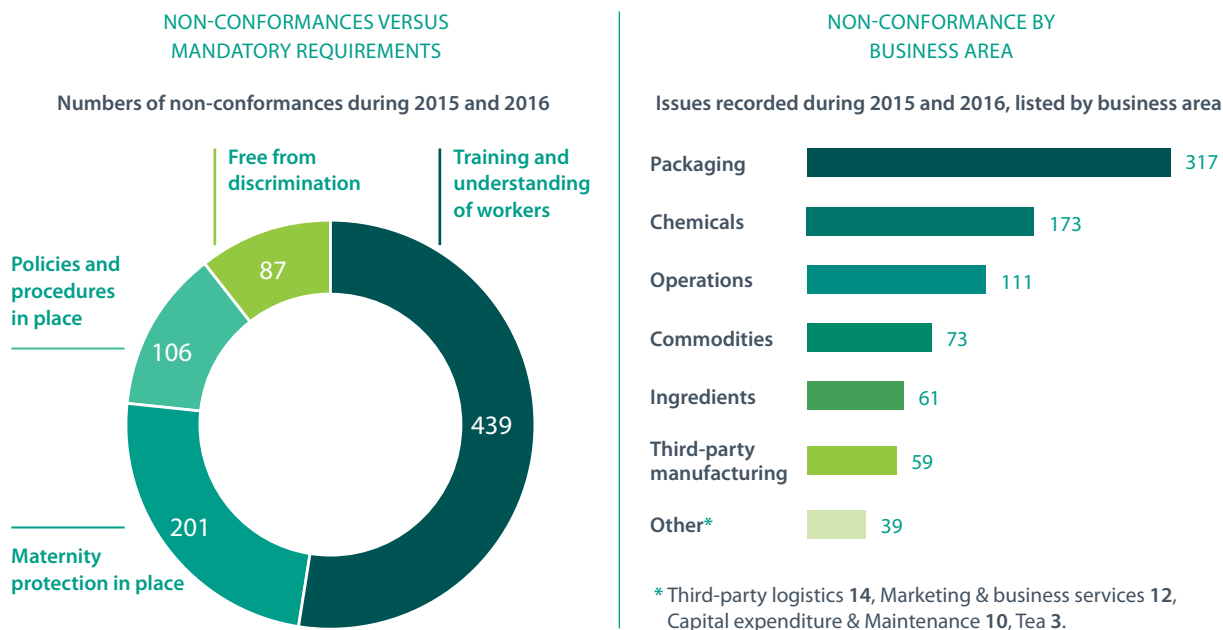
- male and female worker ratio
- number and percentage of management posts by gender
- uptake rate of flexible working arrangements, by gender
- maternity/paternity/parental leave return rates
- percentage of promotions in the organisation's main employee categories, by gender
- the presence of male and female smallholders
- number of community engagement/ investment programmes targeting women
- percentage of suppliers that report on their gender-equality policies and practices.

For companies further removed from production, this can mean demanding their Tier 1 suppliers not only provide regular information on their gender equality performance but also that of their Tier 2 suppliers. Companies can also ensure that suppliers' continuous improvement planning include specific indicators and targets on gender equality.

Employ local staff, including women, in ethical and compliance positions in your company rather than parachuting in head office staff – they will better understand likely areas of gender inequality in the value chain, and have better knowledge of which product processes women are traditionally involved in¹⁷.

Box 8. Company example of gender progress reporting and KPIs: Unilever

Data is taken from audit results relating to the RSP Fundamental Principle 3 – “All workers are treated equally and with respect and dignity”. Unilever found that of the 2,084 sites audited for compliance with their responsible sourcing policy requirement on discrimination and harassment (“All workers are treated equally and with respect and dignity”), there were 833 non-conformances. See how the company has represented this visually.



Using this type of data Unilever have worked with suppliers to increase awareness and to put policies and training in place as well as support the establishment of effective grievance mechanisms. This has resulted in the number of resolved non-conformances rising from 78% to 93% from 2015 to 2016.

Source: https://www.unilever.com/Images/human-rights-progress-report_tcm244-513973_en.pdf

Box 9. IFC suggestions: Embedding Gender in Sustainability Reporting

Organisational objective	Measure		
	Basic	Moderate	Advanced
Do business with organisations that respect gender equality	Description of gender equality in procurement policy and plans	Percentage of suppliers that have gender-equality policies or programmes	Percentage of suppliers that report on their gender-equality policies and practices
			Gender composition of supplier workforce
			Percentage of suppliers’ managerial posts, by gender
Promote women’s entrepreneurship and supplier diversity			Financial value and percentage of total procurement by supplier company and type of good or service, broken down by gender and type of supplier
			Percentage of suppliers’ shareholders, by gender

■ Qualitative performance measurement examples □ Quantitative performance measurement examples

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More information is provided in the references and at www.soytoolkit.net

Please also share with us information that will improve this Briefing Note (via soytoolkit@proforest.net).

Acknowledgments

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References

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- 13 <https://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/enhancing-livelihoods/opportunities-forwomen/>
- 14 https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bfb07-gender-equality-its-your-business-060312-en_3.pdf
- 15 This should require prior consultation with women themselves when designing activities for their inclusion. Consultation should take place at a time that is convenient to women and in a way that encourages their participation, given discriminatory norms around women's unequal time burdens and participation in public meetings/spaces
- 16 The SDG Compass provides guidance for companies on how they can align their strategies as well as measure and manage their contribution to the realisation of the SDGs. On Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls - the SDG Compass brings several useful indicators from GRI Sustainability Reporting Standards and World Bank WDI on how to measure SDG targets on gender. Source: <https://sdgcompass.org/>
- 17 Source: https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bfb07-gender-equality-its-your-business-060312-en_3.pdf

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