

Gender ROI™ Insight Series



15 Gendered approach to value chains

Value chains offer a lucrative opportunity for businesses to address women’s needs

Women leaders in organisations provide essential insights into the lives and needs of women consumers. By creating targeted approaches to better serve women as customers and employees, companies can differentiate themselves with customers and become employers of choice for women in key markets.

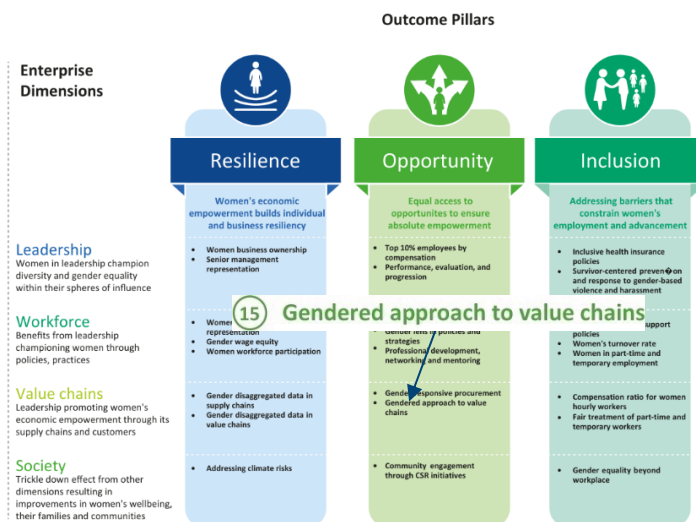
Women play multiple roles in global value chains as producers, entrepreneurs, executives, employees, distributors, and consumers. As drivers of most consumer spending, some US\$31.8 trillion annually, according to research consultancy Frost & Sullivan, women represent a powerful demographic.

For this reason, it’s logical to assume women’s needs are routinely considered in the value chains of products and services, which include the full range of activities from product or service inception to its end use.

Reality tells a different story. Ingrained gender norms and stereotypes mean most products and services offered to women don’t meet their needs. A Boston Consulting Group survey of 12,000 women in 21 countries found that 73 per cent of women were dissatisfied by financial services and 71 per cent were dissatisfied with their financial provider’s product offering. In insurance, those figures were 75 per cent and 74 per cent respectively. Many respondents felt gender was a key factor in how they were treated.

Sweef Capital Director Rowena Reyes says this presents enterprises with a golden opportunity to progress gender equality while claiming a big competitive advantage.

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Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ indicator matrix

“Organisations have significant potential to drive women’s economic empowerment through their value chains, where women’s perspectives and voices are reflected in design, strategy, sales, distribution, advertising, and marketing of products and services,” Ms Reyes says. “Women should be leading these initiatives.

“They bring valuable lived experience and understanding of women consumers’ values, lifestyles, habits, personality traits and purchasing behaviour and as representative of the customer base.”



The Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ identifies gender equality and diversity gaps and informs interventions to build resilience, equal opportunity and inclusion. This Insight Series explores how each indicator contributes to delivering social, financial and economic returns: <https://sweefcapital.com/gender-roitm/>

However, the relative lack of women decision-makers across senior levels means organisations seldom reflect the rich diversity of their consumer base, let alone the makeup of their workforce and suppliers.

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services means gender perspectives often aren’t integrated so women’s specific needs aren’t identified at crucial stages,” Ms Reyes says. “As a result, products and services miss the mark.”

That may be changing. Organisations are under pressure to demonstrate how well corporate practices align with their brand promise. Companies’ adoption of responsible business practices across the value chain is increasingly part of purchasing, partnering, and supplier and investor decision-making, particularly among younger people.

That’s the terrain of impact measurement company 60 Decibels, which works with investors, funders, corporations, non-government organisations and social enterprises to help them improve their social impact performance (see breakout).

The firm uses a Lean Data approach to survey customers, employees and end beneficiaries about their experiences, returning benchmarked insights within short timeframes of two to three months, with recommendations to maximise impact and improve the business.

When it comes to identifying opportunities for gender-positive impact across the value chain, 60 Decibels Director, Ms Nilah Mitchell, says it depends on the industry, the enterprise context and where that organisation is on its gender journey.

“Through our data, we’re able to highlight the different lived experiences of the women and men whom we’re interviewing – for instance, is this the first time they’ve accessed a particular product or service? And were there any particular barriers they’re facing that made it challenging for them to do so?” Ms Mitchell says.

“Maybe they lacked adequate information or specific social norms prevented women from fully accessing or utilising a product or service. In collecting such data, we can help companies understand issues around access, the way a customer uses the company’s offering, customers’ overall experience, and also the impact it has created in customers’ lives.”

Ms Mitchell says value chain analysis, from a gender perspective, is still in its early days in terms of understanding outcome-level data or ground-level changes at scale.

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- Nilah Mitchell, 60 Decibels

“If we look at gender indicators and benchmarks or the data that investors or companies are collecting and analysing, much of it is focused on enterprise or institutional levels,” she says. “We often see indicators measuring gender diversity, or the gender composition of leadership teams or policies and programs. That’s of course important, but it’s also a different exercise to understanding the deeper experience of women customers or beneficiaries across a value chain.”

Such business intelligence might identify the need for a change in strategy or operations, or a shift in marketing or communications approaches.



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“We want to increase accountability in a concrete way by collecting the data and building on our benchmarks,” Ms Mitchell says. “Our data is actionable for companies. By asking the right questions, we’re seeing clients change key parts of their business to better reach and impact their customers. For example, a solar company invested in a better after-sales support process because they found women were not maximising the utility of their product. This change led to more referrals and sales for the business while also enabling women to better use the product for their needs.”

Ms Reyes says women hold the key to unlocking value right along the chain.

“Effectively selling to women requires that companies take an integrated, comprehensive and consistent approach – anchored by true gender equality,” she says. “Enterprises have a vital role in taking action to challenge social norms and discrimination. Fortuitously, that’s also good for business.”#

About the contributors



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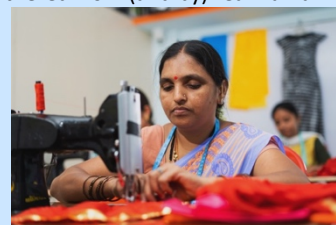
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60 Decibels – Benchmarking social impact, at scale

For 60 Decibels, the human touch is no barrier to global scale. The company’s tagline promises social impact data “gathered from (and by) real human beings”.

In a marriage of frugal innovation and traditional market research, its researchers use mainly mobile phones to gather insights and a sophisticated technology platform to analyse and benchmark against millions of data points gathered over the past decade. The outcome is a set of actionable insights, delivered much faster than conventional impact measurement and evaluation processes.



“We’re trying to make (the process) shorter, hear from a large number of people in less time – accelerate the process a bit,” Ms Mitchell says. “We need to elevate those voices, whether they’re employees or customers at the end of the supply chain or value chain, to hear what they have to say about any changes, which have occurred in their lives. Otherwise it’s just speculative.”

The company is currently working on a set of women's empowerment and digital inclusion projects with Caribou Digital, a major philanthropic institution and its investment partners, to help them understand whether their interventions and the support provided are creating changes in women's lives.

Alongside such initiatives, 60 Decibels is also building a set of unique benchmarks across impact areas such as what farmers need to thrive, quality jobs and the digital literacy of small businesses.

Its recent gender and microfinance analysis includes insights drawn from phone interviews with more than 50,000 clients globally, of which 66 per cent are women. Among the key findings: women have fewer alternatives than men but are more likely to understand loan terms and report greater improvements in financial management; women say their households are better off; and women use their loan for business purposes to achieve their financial goals.

“The foundation of our work is to hear from women and men on the ground,” Ms Mitchell says. “To help them have their voices heard in a meaningful way that can foster change at scale across businesses and sectors.”#

Read more about 60 Decibels’ gender microfinance analysis here: <https://60decibels.com/insights/gender-and-microfinance/>



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