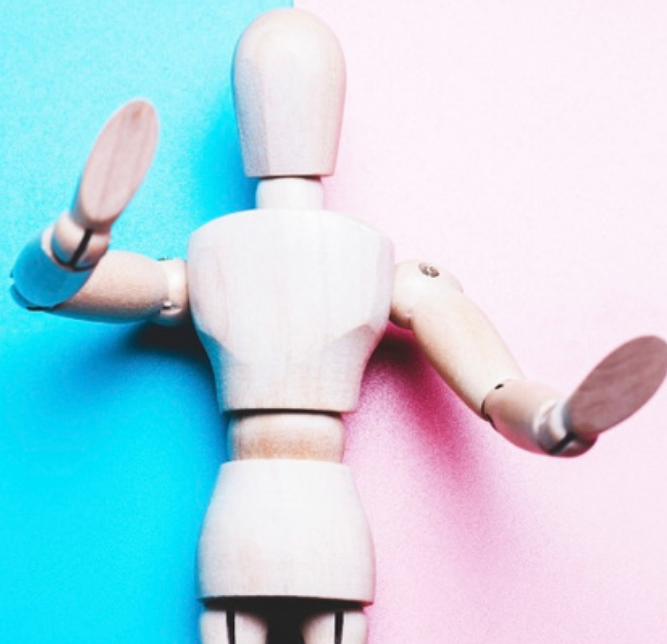




10. Gender-sensitive training of strategic suppliers

Do you count strategic suppliers, which are core to your business success, or is your business model focusing on improving a given supply chain (e.g. sourcing from small-holder farmers or small artisans)? If so, are your gender diversity efforts limited to the boundaries of your own organization, or do you strive to ensure that you source products or services from suppliers aligned with your company's values on diversity and gender equality? Do you take into account how gender-specific issues may affect the type of support your suppliers need from you? Have you considered how supporting your suppliers in gender mainstreaming could positively impact your own organization?



What do we mean by gender-sensitive training of strategic suppliers?

Applying a gender lens within one's own strategic supply chain can be approached in two main ways: The first is to actively seek a more diverse range of suppliers (see resource [#9 – Gender-inclusive selection of strategic suppliers](#)). The second is to help existing suppliers become more gender-inclusive, through gender-focused support programs. These programs often include

gender-focused trainings, workshops or mentorship opportunities, which aim to develop a greater awareness of gender inclusion principles and embed those at their end, ultimately helping them enhance their own performance and impact. Such programs can be rolled out with institutional suppliers, or with individuals, if your organization sources from small-holder farmers or small artisans for instance.

Why does gender-biased training of strategic suppliers happen?

Gender biases are prevalent across both individuals and institutions. Often unintentional, they are rooted in socially constructed beliefs and deep-seated mental models. These biases also influence the supply chain, as highlighted by the fact that only 1% of large corporate procurement spending goes to women-owned businesses [1]. Addressing them requires awareness, expertise and dedicated resources, elements that many organisations lack. While some companies actively work to reduce gender bias internally, this commitment rarely extends to their suppliers, as they may see it as outside their core business concerns. However, without intentional action to support suppliers in adopting gender-inclusive practices, gender bias is likely to persist throughout the value chain, which may result in lost opportunities for your own organization.

Why is gender-sensitive training of strategic suppliers important?

In general, companies that do not mainstream gender equality are less likely to achieve above-average profitability [2], struggle to outperform their peers in EBIT margin, and are less likely to lead their industries in long-term value creation [3]. In fact, their EBIT margins are, on average, 9% lower [4], and their stock returns are 10% lower than those of gender-mainstreamed companies [5]. By investing in gender-focused supplier development, buying organizations can help their suppliers close this gap, leading to substantial improvements in suppliers' performance. This, in turn, benefits the buying company itself as it relies on more competitive, reliable, innovative, and sustainable supply chains [6,7]. Supporting gender inclusivity within the supply chain also strengthens business relationships by fostering loyalty and mutual trust and demonstrates one's commitment to a more equitable business ecosystem.

[1] <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/The-power-of-procurement-How-to-source-from-women-owned-businesses-en.pdf>

[2] https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured_insights/diversity_and_inclusion/diversity_wins_how_inclusion_matters/diversity_wins_how_inclusion_matters-vf.pdf

[3] <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/diversity/41-ISDGBD/GBDExternal/upload/McKinseyDeliverDiv201801-2.pdf>

[4] <https://hbr.org/2018/01/how-and-where-diversity-drives-financial-performance>

[5] <https://hbr.org/2022/09/is-your-board-inclusive-or-just-diverse>

[6] <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373941453>

[7] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305048321001511>

How does one ensure gender-sensitive training of strategic suppliers?

If your organization is strategically dependent on its supply chain, but cannot easily change or change its supplier base, it can work on making its existing suppliers more gender inclusive. It however requires investing in your suppliers in the following ways:

1. **Distinguish between gender-sensitive and gender-specific training:** Gender-sensitive training focuses on raising awareness about gender biases, how they manifest themselves and strategies to address them. It helps individuals detect gender stereotypes, understand their impact, and promote a more inclusive work environment. Typical topics would include the distribution of responsibilities within the household, decision-making, in particular regarding monetary matters, or the importance of balanced and inclusive institutional governance. Gender-specific training, on the other hand, is tailored to the unique needs of different genders within an organization, addressing specific gender-related challenges. It can enhance technical and management skills, organizational practices or policies tailored to each supplier's challenges, e.g. financial management or marketing. For instance, such training could include digital upskilling for low-income women craft suppliers in a supply chain that offers access to market services through an online platform, as a way to acknowledge the very specific barriers and needs that this segment has.
 - In both cases, make sure that the delivery of such training is gender-appropriate. For instance, women will have fewer possibilities to join in-person training, due to their household duties, and will be less inclined to participate actively in settings with a majority of men participants. While designing a training, follow these practical guidelines:
 - focus on applied, context-specific learning, delivered bite-sized. Tangibly demonstrates what needs to be fixed, how, and what are the benefits are, through real-world examples, testimonials, and peer-to-peer learning
 - confront prejudice through counter-stereotypical information and self-reflection; work on identifying and addressing gender (unconscious) biases
 - ensure effective post-training ongoing support, until the organization starts reaping the benefits of the changes made and internalizes the necessity of it
 - continuously evaluate the effectiveness of training through surveys and engagement metrics.
2. **Offer appropriate training resources:** For well-established institutional suppliers, consider sharing standardized, easy-to-scale and access online training resources relative to driving gender equity in organisational settings (for instance, see our free training [here](#)). Smaller suppliers, cooperatives, or informal organisations may benefit more from in-person workshops that explore gender dynamics within households, communities and various group settings. In such settings, encourage interactive discussions to help participants reflect on gender roles at home and work, ultimately promoting inclusive perspectives across different spheres.
3. **Create a gender mainstreaming charter for suppliers:** Develop a formal charter or document that outlines the commitment that your supplier organizations need to promote and strive for. It can include specific guidelines and goals, such as promoting gender-balanced leadership, offering equal opportunities for all genders, and fostering a workplace culture that actively supports gender equity. By having each supplier sign this

document, you establish a shared commitment and accountability framework, setting the standard for gender inclusivity and encouraging long-term alignment with your own organizational values. You can also go one step further, and include specific objectives to reach within a given timeframe. This then allows you to track each supplier's progress over time and provide support where necessary.

How to measure progress and success?

Through our own, LeFil's [research](#), we identified a number of metrics that can be improved through gender-focused initiatives, and which are meaningful to track as you progress with the implementation of your efforts. For some of these metrics, we provide a benchmark value, which is the average that close to 100 ventures like yours recorded after having worked on this topic. These metrics are:

Metric	Benchmark
Annual percentage increase in number of customers/ users/ end beneficiaries	81% [8]
Proportion of men/ women among customers/ users/ end beneficiaries	40% women
Proportion of strategic suppliers achieving better gender inclusion and diversity	43%
Proportion of your organisation's strategic suppliers trained to better achieve gender inclusion and diversity	31%
Proportion of women customers/ users/ end beneficiaries who feel empowered by your product/ service	62%
Customer/ user/ end beneficiary satisfaction	81%
Strategic supplier productivity as a result of the implementation of gender-inclusive policies	N/A
Annual growth rate in earned revenue	71%
Proportion of staff trained in gender mainstreaming	59%

[8] With outlier. without outlier 154%

Case studies

HILO SAGRADO

Improving gender equity among indigenous artisanal communities by Hilo Sagrado

Hilo Sagrado empowered indigenous women artisans by implementing gender training in their communities, to raise awareness of the unconscious gender bias and limitations faced by women. It also promoted inclusive policies to increase women representation in decision-making.

Fundación Hilo Sagrado is an artisanal business incubator and an online sales platform for Colombian handicrafts. Its suppliers are artisans from the Wayúu indigenous communities in La Guajira, which live in extreme poverty and are stigmatized for their ways of life. Hilo Sagrado helps them establish a sustainable artisanal production by enhancing their technical skills, modernizing production centers, and providing access to markets. By doing so, the venture seeks to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of indigenous communities while preserving their cultural legacy.

Hilo Sagrado's team took part in our Gender Mainstreaming Workshop, and realized that the productivity of its women suppliers was hindered by cultural and gender biases. Despite being skilled in weaving and artisanal crafts, Wayúu women are excluded from local economic, social, and political leadership. Additionally, they are in charge of taking care of the family, children and household, which reduces the time they can dedicate to artisanal labor. This often leads to delayed product deliveries, which harm Hilo Sagrado's sales and customer relations. Hence, the venture developed an initiative to reduce gender bias among local communities and enhance women's empowerment and social inclusion, and in turn their productivity. To do so, Hilo Sagrado:

- engaged local community leaders on the topic of gender biases, and worked with them to develop and implement a survey to identify such biases in their communities
- with the support of a gender expert, delivered gender training to community leaders and members, and distributed an educational booklet that visualizes and explains the identified gender biases, to help community members (both men and women) recognize and mitigate internalized gender stereotypes
- amended its own bylaws to include a representative of indigenous women on its Board of Directors, to ensure their representation in decision-making processes.

As a result of the initiative, local women were empowered to take on leadership roles in their communities. Across the 8 Wayúu communities that Hilo Sagrado works with, the number of women leaders increased from 1 to 2-4 per community. A key takeaway was the importance of involving men in the discourse, not in a blaming but inclusive and motivational way. The venture also noticed a positive impact on children and youth, thanks to the new gender awareness acquired by their parents. Internally, Hilo Sagrado recorded a 14% increase in

supplier productivity, a 20% increase in women's representation on its Board of Directors, and a 50% increase in the Board's satisfaction. The venture plans to build on this initiative and continue integrating gender bias workshops into future programs, such as an upcoming WWF program in La Guajira.



Closing the gender gap in supplier productivity with Oaxaca en una caja

Oaxaca en una caja empowered its women suppliers and improved their production levels by providing a targeted training program, individual mentoring and on-site childcare.

Oaxaca en una caja commercializes Mexican handicrafts and food products made by local Oaxacan artisans. The venture sources the products from its suppliers in large batches, and sells them as social gifts to corporate clients such as companies, event organizers and wedding planners, thus generating higher and more secure income for the artisans.

Oaxaca en una caja's team took part in our Gender Mainstreaming Workshop and realized that, despite having a 50-50% gender split among its suppliers, the production level of women artisans was 30% lower than that of their men counterparts. Additionally, women producers had a lower retention rate. The reasons for these disparities were identified in the women's limited time availability due to domestic responsibilities, and their restricted access to formal training and economic resources to invest in their production. To address these barriers, Oaxaca en una caja designed and piloted a targeted training with 25 craftswomen, to help them improve the quality of their products and expand to new markets. With this initiative, the venture aimed at strengthening the women's financial independence while also boosting its own sales. To do so, Oaxaca en una caja:

- provided 1:1 mentoring to establish a goal plan with each of the participants
- crafted a 10-module training program, with specialized workshops based on the needs of the artisans and the outcomes of the individual mentoring, covering entrepreneurship skills, handicrafts and agro-industrial production
- offered on-site playrooms and daycare services during the training sessions
- carried out continuous individual follow-up and monitoring after training completion.

The initiative proved successful, leading to a 68% increase in production by women artisans and a 5% increase both in Oaxaca en una caja's revenue and number of clients. All the craftswomen who participated in the training program felt empowered and welcomed into a network with other women, and 63% of them started applying the newly acquired skills to their businesses. Moreover, the initiative gained a lot of visibility and brought attention to the topic of women's empowerment in the state of Oaxaca; as a result, the venture positioned itself as a leader in gender inclusion, and received support from the state to replicate and scale up the initiative at regional level. Additionally, given the high need and demand, Oaxaca en

una caja is continuing to build up its organizational capacity to train artisans and small producers: it launched an accelerator program to help scale the business of women entrepreneurs, and it aims to establish a permanent development center to provide tools and support for women artisans and entrepreneurs.