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The business case for investing in women's access and agency



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All blogs

AWEF is calling for case studies that demonstrate the business case for promoting women's access and agency in the workplace.

Demonstrating the 'business case' for women's participation in the labour force and workplace^[1] is a popular buzzword and the focus of many economic development programmes.

A number of studies have shown that when businesses address issues of gender diversity in their business models and core operations they see an improvement in performance and increased profits.^[2] More inclusive business practices in turn empower women and can help challenge gender inequalities within households and the wider community and industry.^[3]

To date, much of the evidence to support these economic benefits to women and companies has come from studies conducted in North America and Europe. Evidence to demonstrate the specific return on investment (ROI) to business from focusing on women's access and agency in developing countries is still scarce, including practical methodologies for calculating the costs and benefits.^[4]

Women's economic empowerment is the outcome of both access and agency.^[5] Women are economically empowered when they have **access** to resources, opportunities and assets that allow them to upgrade their economic position, as well as the **agency** to act on and make economic decisions. A market systems approach to women's empowerment engages private sector actors to increase women's access to jobs, services, assets and opportunities as well as their agency – that is, their 'voice, choice, and control' - in a sustainable manner.^[6]

However, we currently know very little about how to effectively calculate the economic value of women's access and agency, particularly in the context of developing and emerging markets:

- What is the economic value of women's agency and access for the business, the wider economy, as well as the women themselves?
- What performance indicators speak to businesses and how can these be linked to WEE?
- What does success look like for businesses, what incentivises them and how can businesses be encouraged to make decisions to move WEE initiatives forward in a sustainable and institutionalised manner?

With an increasing focus on women's agency, in addition to access and participation, it is critical that practitioners identify new methods for calculating, pitching and monitoring the ROI of women's increased workplace engagement in ways the private sector understands.

As part of Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (AWEF) programme, DFID, DAI Europe, MarketShare Associates and their private sector partners in Egypt and Jordan have taken on a two-year learning agenda to investigate the business case, impact and value for money of enhancing women's access and agency in MSD programming.

This year's Practitioner Learning Brief is the first step towards this learning objective. The purpose of the Practitioner Brief is to bring together learning emerging from AWEF as well as the wider MSD and WEE practitioner community on how to effectively work with market actors to build the business case around women's access and agency in the workplace.

Call for Case Studies

We are looking for practitioners from organisations and programmes that work with the private sector to address issues of women's access and/or agency in the market and workplace to submit case studies on this topic.

Selected practitioners will benefit from the visibility of having their case study shared through SEEP's Women's Economic Empowerment Community of Practice and AWEF Practitioner Learning Brief. The top five case studies will be presented as part of the AWEF's Women in Market Systems Symposium to be held in Autumn 2019 in the Middle East. Partial funding will be made available to subsidise travel and subsistence costs.

Interested practitioners are invited to submit their case studies by **14th of September 2018** through the [SEEP website](#). All questions in relation to this call for case studies can be directed to [Julia Lipowiecka](#)

[1] Women Matter. Time to Accelerate. McKinsey. 2017.

[2] Pellegrino, Greg; Sally D'Amato, and Anne Weisberg. "The Gender Dividend: Making the business case for investing in women." Deloitte. 2011; "Gender Diversity in Top Management: Moving corporate culture, moving boundaries." Women Matter. McKinsey and Company. 2013.

[3] Ibid.

[4] LEO Brief. Making the Business Case: Women's Economic Empowerment in Market Systems Development. 2015.

[5] Anne Marie Golla et al., Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework and Indicators. (Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, 2011).

[6] LEO, Women's Economic Empowerment: Pushing the Frontiers of Inclusive Market Development, 2014.