

BEST PRACTICES FOR
INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY
AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT IN SME
PROGRAMMING IN M-SAWA

THE M-SAWA PROJECT



In partnership with
Canada

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ACRONYMS

MEDA	Mennonite Economic Development Associates
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SEs	Small Entrepreneurs
SME's	Small and Medium Enterprises
LF	Lead Firm
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
GEM	Gender Equality Mainstreaming
ADS	Automated Directives Systems
GE	Gender Equality
BAs	Business Associations
BDS	Business Development Services
HR	Human Resource
GBC	Gender Based Constraints
EPTPSD	Equitable Prosperity Through Private Sector Development
LAPSSET	Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport
LVF	Lakeview Fisheries
GALS	Gender Action Learning Systems

ABSTRACT

The M-SAWA project is a 7-year economic development program funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and implemented by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) which completed activities in July 2022. The ultimate goal of the project was to ensure equitable economic and employment growth through profitable, competitive, and sustainable beneficiary small entrepreneurs (SEs) and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the project's three priority sectors of agriculture, extractives and construction in targeted regions of Kenya. A key target of the project was to support women-led businesses and encourage SMEs to consider the gendered needs of SEs within their supply/distribution chains as well we improve their corporate gender practices. Key strategies used by the project in support of this goal was the development of gendered action plans, grant support for gender-focused activities and the provision of additional Gender Equality Mainstreaming (GEM) grants to deepen gender work.

This paper focuses on Lead Firms (LFs) engaged by the project as recipients of the GEM grants as well as additional gender support. LFs are defined as SMEs with strong supply/distribution chain linkages with SEs. They were engaged to implement initiatives supporting the growth of the LF along with its suppliers/distributors. The paper focuses on activities implemented to support increased LF capacity to implement enhanced gender-equitable business growth with a special focus on creating a strategic human resource (HR) function that promotes gender diversity. The paper is based on secondary data extracted from reports, project documents, schedules and matrices developed throughout the project. The data was collected through desk review of the existing reports, interview of selected LFs (4 out of 25), and cross validation and review of various gender frameworks.

Automated Directives Systems (ADS) Chapter 205 of *Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in the USAID Program Cycle* was critical in assessing how gender responsive the project was, based on the five-band gender domains. This study had ten broad questions that can be summarised into two main concerns:

- 1) What do grant partners feel is the “business case” for advancing gender equality objectives for their businesses and;
- 2) Whether the grants with gender objectives (i.e. the Gender Action Plans and associated activities) supported through the project helped to advance gender equality among project clients.

The paper establishes that the LFs have a strong business case for advancing gender equality, with the project overall seeing positive economic impacts among LFs, SMEs, and SEs implementing gender equality (GE) activities. The LFs targeted by the project reported increased profitability within their supply chains, with 52% of 1,540 SEs surveyed reporting an increase, 48% of them being women. 49% of 1,540 SEs surveyed (46% being women) reported an increase in their incomes while 31% (17% being women-led) of 104 SMEs reported a positive change in job creation within their companies. At the SE level, 51% (48% being women-led) of 1,540 SEs surveyed reported changes in job creation. These findings support the assertion that integrating GE in businesses improved profitability, community economic growth and job creation.

Further, 90% of the 104 SMEs surveyed cumulatively at Year 7 (final project year) (53% of which were women-led) reported a positive change in their capacity to implement GE business growth plans. 68% of 270 allied SMEs surveyed cumulatively as of year 7 reported a change in their capacity to implement improved GE practices as a result of their participation in joint supply chain initiatives. These findings confirm that the LFs and Business Associations (BAs) engaged by the project have increased their capacity to integrate GE and women's economic empowerment into their work.

All grant partners (LFs and BAs) were supported to develop and implement 2 gender focused activities and develop wider action plans as well as provided with GE technical support. As noted above, a number of LFs were also provided with follow-on grants which applied MEDA's GEM approach. GEM is practical manual and toolkit for assessing gender equality, and identifying, implementing and measuring gender equality mainstreaming strategies within companies.

This paper finds that partners that received GEM grants were able to advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment. This is because their gender action plans, and associated activities addressed the concerns of the five domains recommended by ADS Chapter 205 of integrating gender equality and female empowerment. These are: a) Laws, Policies, Regulations and Institutional Practices; b) Cultural Norms and Beliefs; c) Gender Roles, Responsibilities and Time Use; d) Access to and Control over Assets and Resources (including income, employment, and assets such as land); and e) Patterns of Power and Decision-making.

Some of the winning strategies employed by the LFs included:

- 1) Introduction of Anti-discrimination policy at workplace of most LFs;
- 2) Gender focused training on financial literacy, two-third gender rule and advocacy;

- 3) Identification and training of gender champions that would champion the efforts towards integrating gender within the operations of the LFs;
- 4) Development of various policies including HR and gender policies and strategy;
- 5) Development of gender action plans and other gender related activities;
- 6) Identification of specific gender-based constraints (GBCs) and continuous tracking of efforts to address those GBCs at the LF and project level;
- 7) Gender policies and their implementation and continuous tracking of progress.

Some of the major leanings highlight that:

- 1) Continuous gender analysis is an integral part of implementing a sustainable gender equality mainstreaming project like M-SAWA;
- 2) GEM initiatives must invest in activities that raise women's capabilities and productivity;
- 3) Need to engage men, boys, stakeholders and community members in gender activities;
- 4) Women are not a monolithic group which is dealing with one set of challenges and constraints;
- 5) Continuous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data helps in building evidence base for successful practices;
- 6) Women at the grassroots levels have business models that can work for them;
- 7) An intersectional approach is critical for inclusivity and;
- 8) Gender analysis should be conducted early in the formative stage of a project.

The following areas have been recommended for further investigation:

- 1) There is need to establish if there are notable shifts in gender roles, responsibilities and time use as a result of the M-SAWA project;
- 2) A need to establish how increases in company profitability were felt by men and women within the value chain and how this profitability was reflected in the household economy;
- 3) Evaluate the impact of gender training at the household level;

- 4) Evaluate how different classes of women intersect with the impact of the project;
- 5) Document the unexpected project-induced gender impacts of the GEM activities implemented by the M-SAWA Project;
- 6) To identify the LFs who have budgetary allocation to GEM activities post M-SAWA as a sustainability strategy for GEM interventions; and,
- 7) Determine what training content was the most useful/interesting for the LFs and what content was most adaptable by LFs.

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The Equitable Prosperity through Private Sector Development (EPTPSD) Project, also referred to as the Equitable Prosperity or Maendeleo Sawa (M-SAWA) project was implemented by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) in Kenya from 2015 to 2022. The M-SAWA project was made possible with the generous support of the Government of Canada, through Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

We would like to thank M-SAWA’s many partners, staff and MEDA’s generous private supporters.

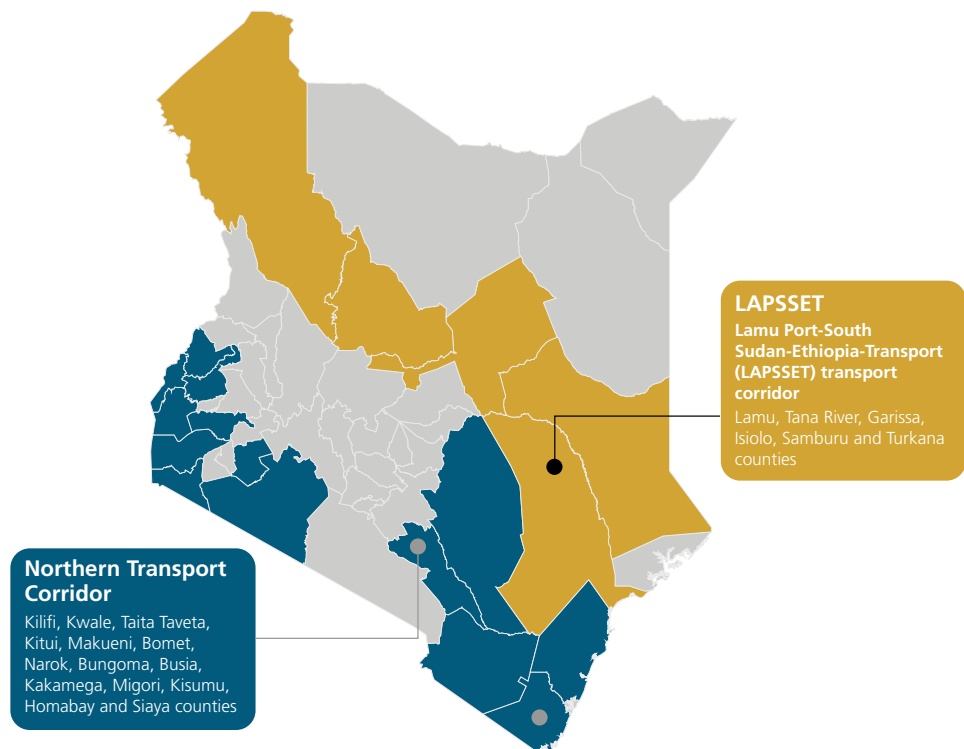
1. INTRODUCTION

About the M-SAWA Project

The Equitable Prosperity through Private Sector Development (EPTSDP) Project also referred to as the Equitable Prosperity or Maendeleo Sawa (M-SAWA) Project is a seven-year, \$28.7 million CAD initiative funded/implemented by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) (supporters, partners, and investors) with funding from Global Affairs Canada (GAC) implemented from 2015 to 2022.

M-SAWA aimed to contribute to Kenya’s economic growth and increase job creation by improving the business, environmental and gender performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and small entrepreneurs (SEs) in 20 select counties along the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET)

and Northern Corridors in the following 3 project focus sectors: Agriculture/ Agribusiness, Construction/Allied Industries, and Extractives. In support of this goal, MEDA offered Matching Grants to Lead Firms (LFs), Business Associations (Bas) and SMEs. The project worked with 2 categories of SMEs – LFs and other SMEs benefiting from business development services (BDS), access to investment/financing, and participation in BAs/SME alliances. LFs are defined as SMEs with strong supply and/or distribution chain linkages with SEs which were engaged to implement initiatives supporting the growth of the LF along with its suppliers/distributors. In this context, LFs are ‘inclusive businesses’ that play pivotal roles in moving their industry and other value chain actors forward.



The MEDA M-SAWA Learning Series

This paper is part of a series of learning documents developed by MEDA focused on identifying and sharing key lessons learned over the life of the M-SAWA project. There are a total of 9 documents in this series, each focusing on a key project element, namely:

- 1) Best practices and lessons learned in delivery of Business Development Services (BDS)
- 2) Collaboration between Business Associations and Lead Firms
- 3) The impact of COVID-19 on SMEs and Lead Firms

- 4) The impact of Technology adoption grants (TAG) Grants
- 5) Access to Finance for Women-led SMEs
- 6) Business Case for Gender Equality Mainstreaming (GEM)
- 7) Use of Environmental Action Plans (EAPs) with SME Partners
- 8) Impact of Environmental Sustainability Grants (ESG)
- 9) Promoting Investment in the SME sector in Kenya

This learning paper focuses on the best practices and lessons learned from Gender Equality Mainstreaming approach supported by MEDA'S M-SAWA project.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is evidence based, with the bulk of the data being secondary as extracted from various reports, project documents, schedules and matrices. The data was collected through desk review of the existing reports, interview of selected LFs (4 out of 25), cross validation and review of various gender frameworks. Further, the framework presented in ADS Chapter 205 of *Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in the USAID Program Cycle* was critical in assessing the level of gender responsiveness of the project based on the five-band gender domains.

This paper summarizes MEDA's evolving Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) strategy, highlighting how M-SAWA deepened its gender approach and mainstreaming capabilities throughout the project, with a focus on the impacts of this evolving approach on LFs and BAs. This includes the introduction of grantee or partner Gender Action Plans and associated activities (i.e. gender training, nominating gender focal persons, gender-focused activities, plan monitoring), and the implementation of the Gender Equality Mainstreaming (GEM) Framework methodology through specific GEM grants.

Specifically, this learning paper focuses on answering the following key research questions:

- i. What do the grant partners feel to be the “business case” for advancing gender equality objectives for their businesses? E.g. how does it help their bottom line?

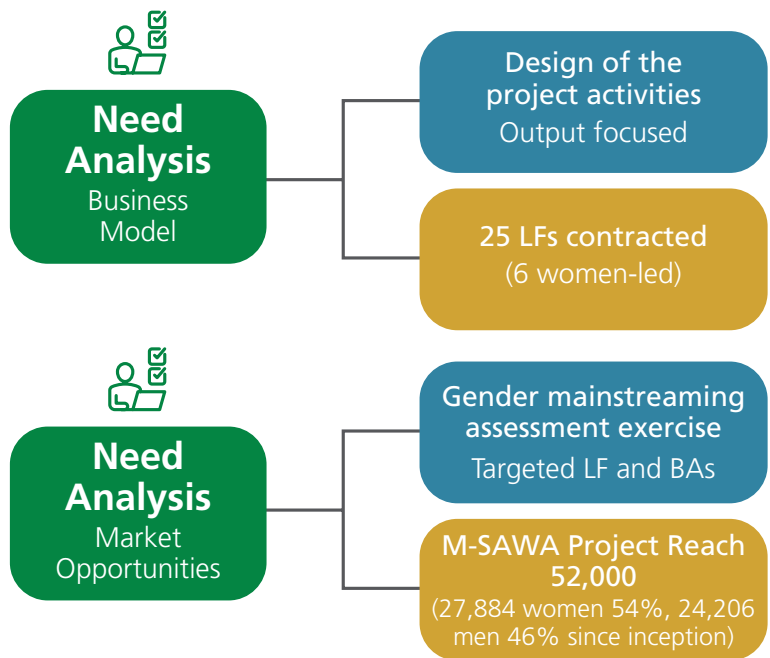
- ii. Have the grants with gender objectives (i.e. the Gender Action Plans and associated activities) helped to advance gender equality among LF/BA clients?
- iii. Do grant partners have the capacity to integrate gender equality and women's economic empowerment into their work (internally/ within their supply/distribution chains)? Has this changed (increased/ decreased)? What led to this change?
- iv. Is the M-SAWA approach to integrating gender equality into the activities of grant partners sustainable? After the project, what have grant partners put in place to continue this work? (E.g. will gender focal persons continue to advance these objectives?)
- v. Have the gender activities implemented by the grant partners made an impact on their relationship with their suppliers/clients? If so, how? (e.g. through gender training/support grant partners have improved their HR policies, addressed mobility challenges for women suppliers, improved their marketing strategies, etc.)
- vi. Have the gender activities implemented by the grant partners had an impact on their internal operations? If so, how? (e.g. through gender training/support grant partners have improved their HR policies, developed and implemented a gender policy, etc.)
- vii. Have the recommendations from the GEM Framework assessment been integrated into the grant partners' businesses effectively? If not, why? If so, are these activities improving their business activities?
- viii. Did the GEM grants contribute to shifting the perspective of grant partners on the benefits of advancing gender equality for their businesses?
- ix. How can the gender support (i.e. development/implementation of Gender Action Plans or GEM grants) provided by the M-SAWA project be improved for future programs?

3. BACKGROUND

The M-SAWA project began with a detailed needs analysis for SMEs and SEs related to both business models and market opportunities which informed the design of project. By the project's endpoint, a total of 25 Lead Firms (LFs) were contracted (6 women-led) as well as 12 Business Associations (BAs). The BDS component reached 304 (177 women) SMEs through 9 BDS providers namely:

AMSCO, ANDE, Anne Kimari (independent BDS consultant), BPI, CERDS, Growth Africa, Lundin Foundation, NetBiz and Ongoza.

Additionally, as is best practice for MEDA projects, during the project start-up phase M-SAWA conducted a gender assessment exercise for the targeted sectors of the project.



This paper focuses on M-SAWA’s evolving gender equality strategy and gender mainstreaming activities conducted with LFs and BAs through an examination of the gender activities of four LFs and one BDS provider in relation to the capacity of these partners to implement enhanced gender equitable and environmentally sustainable business growth. The matrix below provides a summary of the activities targeted by the four sampled LFs and one BDS provider who received GEM grants, with a focus on the gender activities that they undertook as a result of these grants.

Strategy 2: Create a strategic HR function that promotes gender diversity	
Partner	GEM Activities
Smart Logistics (Lead Firm)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a staff diversity performance management system Formalize and revise company HR policies to include a gender perspective Establish anonymous grievances procedure and a system for continuous employee feedback

Strategy 2: Create a strategic HR function that promotes gender diversity

<p>Acacia (Lead Firm)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a fair compensation policy. Define clear job levels, salary bands, qualifications/ experience guidelines, and regular performance appraisal process • Develop an employee training and development plan including gender training and sensitization to avoid unconscious biases. • Conduct exit interviews to understand attrition and improve retention. • Establish HR performance management system that monitors key performance indicators related to recruitment, promotions, attrition, disaggregated by gender, job function and level
<p>Lakeview Fisheries (Lead Firm)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a staff performance management system • Create formal staff training program integrating gender topics • Establish a career development program for staff members • Develop a mentorship program for women staff • Conduct monthly women’s career development meetings
<p>HIMILO (Lead Firm)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct monthly women’s career development meetings • In-house training on competency development, efficiency and effectiveness in female employees’ operations. • In-house training on gender equality through recruitment, promotion, and retention of female employees. • Staff induction as well as training on the gender needs assessment
<p>CERDS (BDS Provider)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafting a Gender Inclusive Human Resource Manual for CERDS • Training / mentorship program for junior women staff • Creating an employee performance management system • Conducting an annual employee satisfaction survey

This paper will focus on the LF level, using examples from Smart Logistics, Acacia, Lakeview Fisheries and HIMILO. A separate paper in the learning series focuses on the experience of BDS providers including CERDS.

Gender integration in project, LF, BA and SME Activities – In Year 2, the project planned to carry out an in-depth gender needs assessment building on research conducted at project inception to better understand the gender constraints affecting women SEs and SMEs in the project's target sectors and geographies. This in-depth assessment was unfortunately not completed due to changes in staffing at the field level. However, once a permanent gender equality team was established, they conducted a thorough review of the initial assessment findings as well as iterative project learning from donor reports to identify six critical Gender-Based Constraints (GBCs). These which represented gender-focused inequalities and barriers that were affecting women and men SEs and LFs (listed below) to be focus areas for the project:

- Limited access to the financial services by women
- Cumbersome legal processes for business establishment and protection
- Lack of private sector capacity on gender equality and women economic empowerment
- Social and cultural restrictions for women entrepreneurs (gender equality and human rights issues),
- Limited use of technology, lack of linkages/ markets, to link women SE and LFs to support their activities with market and production information,
- Gender blind policies and practices.

The team also identified key intervention points or strategies to address these GBCs:

- Initiate/contribute to developing strategic alliances and promoting ongoing learning and engagement with relevant stakeholders (e.g. project staff, business associations, government actors, donor representatives).
- Increase knowledge of existing and emerging gender issues in business environments in the three project sectors (includes ongoing learning and assessment from LF gender engagement).
- Incorporate gender criteria into LF selection, due diligence process and monitoring (including LF Gender Action Planning).
- Provide training and generate greater awareness of gender equality and women's empowerment issues in the business environment (includes GE training and capacity building of firms and gender focal persons).

- Ensure that issues affecting women entrepreneurs are included and addressed through the provision of improved inputs and production information, BDS services, gender responsive financial products/services and access to markets [including targeted GE activities in Gender Action Plans (GAPs) to address these constraints, capacitation of BDS providers, information and knowledge sharing].
- Assist in engendering M&E and conduct a gendered review of project measurement tools, reporting and work planning.

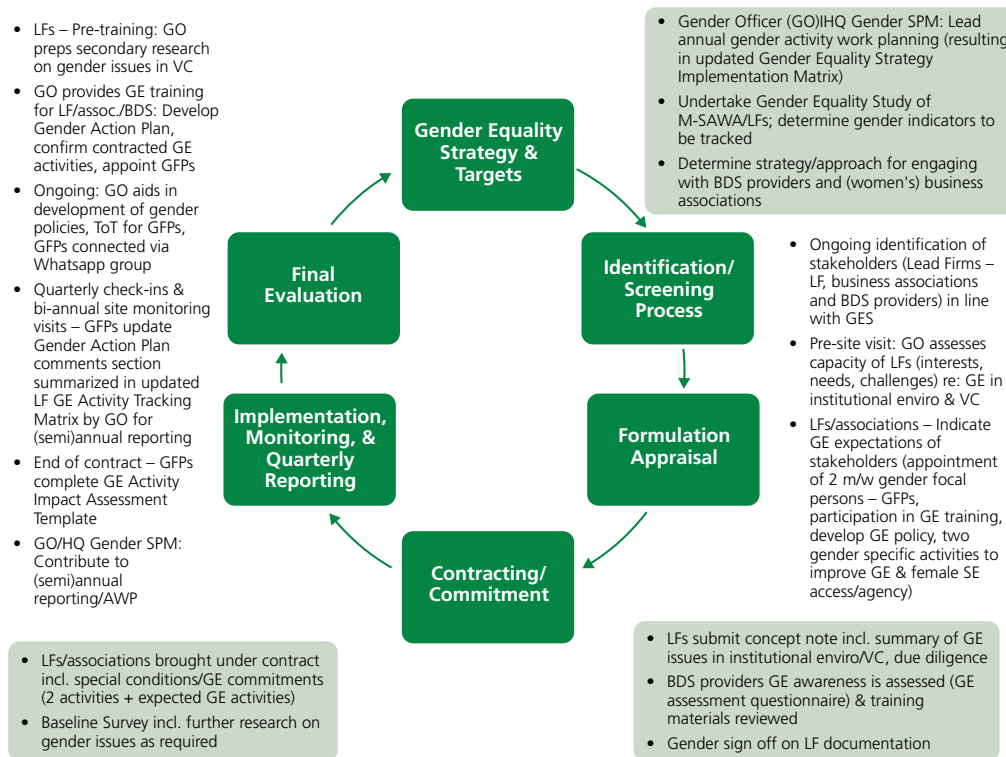
A large part of the project's gender equality mainstreaming efforts were concentrated on incorporating gender-focused criteria into LF and BA contracting phases, including concept development, grant development, site visits to prospective applicants, due diligence, finalizing the contract, and the elaboration of M&E requirements for project activities. The project piloted an enhanced gender equality mainstreaming and capacity strengthening methodology whereby contracted LF/BAs were expected to adhere to a set of gender mainstreaming activities as part of their grant. This included, proposing a minimum of two gender activities to be undertaken in the grant, participating in a gender equality training for staff (and SEs if desired), developing and implementing a GAP with associated activities as part of their grant, and nominate one to two gender focal persons to help steward their gender activities.

Previously, partners were required to propose two gender activities to be executed through their grant; however, the project gender team noted that applicants tended to fall back on the same few activities which the team felt should be contracting requirements rather than grant activities, notably hosting a gender training and establishing a gender policy. Moreover, these exercises are one-off activities, and the team determined that they would not be as impactful as a thorough analysis of the real gender and business issues the partners were experiencing to help bring awareness to the real value and business case for gender transformative work.

As a result of this enhanced methodology, partners were expected to participate in a gender equality training exercise hosted by the project gender officer following the finalization of their contract, culminating in the development of a GAP to address any needs/gaps the partner identified as key to improving gender equality within their company or entity. These GAPs were also aligned with the project's six GBCs and monitored and reported on by the partners through the gender officer on a bi-annual basis. The team found that as a result of this enhanced assessment and action planning methodology partners were increasingly willing to take on more than the two gender activities were required

by the project and expanded their focus to include several other activities that they noted were critical to advancing gender equality within their business model. The diagram below describes this enhanced methodology within the grant life cycle:

Mainstreaming Gender into M-SAWA Lead Firm Process & Activities



In addition to the enhanced gender equality mainstreaming methodology with partners, the project team sought further opportunities to integrate gender equality considerations into the project's impact with partners by piloting two special grants: GEM and Gender Action Learning System (GALS) Grants. These grants were made available for grantees in the later years of the project, and the project team found that partners who were pursuing their second round of funding through MEDA often applied for these opportunities. This paper examines the results of the GEM Grants, while the GALS Grant impacts will be explored in a separate study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In sum, the M-SAWA project integrated gender equality considerations within the project particularly in the work with partners using the following approaches:

1. Introduction of GEM and GALS grants;

2. Establishment of the project Gender Equality Strategy that included the identification of six critical GBCs both at project and grantee or partner level and tracking of the strategy's impact to address the GBCs;
3. Development of GAPs and implementation of gender related activities;
4. Continuous collection of gender and age disaggregated data along the project cycle to monitor progress towards advancing gender equality, as well as specialized learning studies focused on gender issues;
5. Identification of gender risks along the project cycle and determination of gender responsive interventions to mitigate the risks;
6. Strategic partnerships and capacity strengthening with various actors to achieve systems-level impact on gender barriers;
7. Gender responsive reporting clearly showing the status of activities and their impact on SEs and partners in relation to the GAPs and related gender activities.

Specifically, the paper attempts to bring to light the various gender-related impacts realized as a result of the project's work with grantees and partners as well as with SEs. The relevance and effect of integrating gender equality considerations has been discussed and organized under the following thematic areas/questions:

a) What do the grant partners feel is the “business case” for advancing gender equality objectives for their businesses? E.g. how does it help their bottom line?

Before the M-SAWA project inception, the four LFs and one BDS contracted confirmed that they were all struggling with various forms of gender inequalities. The following three¹ LFs all received project grants which included the development of GAP activities, as well as follow-on GEM grants. For example, HIMILO Construction confirmed that they did not have women representation at the management levels. Women were paid relatively low wages compared to their male colleagues, and the recruitment process mostly favoured the men, while there was little to no attention was paid to the women employees. Further, women were not considered for job promotions and mainly held secretarial and cleaning positions.

Acacia EPZ reported that leadership positions were majorly dominated by the men and that women were not represented at the senior management level.

¹ Four LFs and one BDS were targeted for this paper. However only three LFs provided primary data that informed this section.



The recruitment process mostly favoured men more than women and there were pay inequalities because women received less pay in comparison to men.

In Lakeview Fisheries (LVF) Ltd, cultural norms and practices limited women potential and capacities. For example, staff noted that: “Many of the people in these areas do believe that some activities and work such as boat riding and fishing should be handled by men and not women”. There was sexual exploitation of women through the practice of jaboya,² lack of women in

² Women were sexually exploited through ‘jaboya’, which as explained by the respondent means that men fishermen require sexual favours from the women in order to supply them with fish as traders.

managerial position, gender pay inequality where women were paid less compared to the men and a recruitment process that favoured men.³

The gender inequalities mentioned above relate to inadequate or a lack of Human Resources (HR) policies as well as prevailing cultural norms and traditions that influence gender relations within the workplace. To address these inequalities, the LFs that identified these issues within their GAPs were supported to develop HR policies. For example, HIMILO Construction contracted an HR consultant to review job positions and recommend avenues of promotion that would specifically ensure women are also promoted and not forgotten.

Acacia EPZ intentionally created positions for women within the organization and through the advice of the HR consultant, they have standardized the salaries of both men and women based on their performance.

LVF on the other hand embarked on empowerment trainings for women to address sexual exploitation. They trained women on how to fish and ride boats, therefore challenging the cultural norms and practices that society has used to limit them. They also set aside specific seats for women to hold at the managerial level and improved remuneration for women. The company noted that: “we have gone a step further and added benefit such as medical cover through the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) as well as paid leave.” To ensure more women were recruited, the LF stopped using referrals in recruitment processes and instead based recruitment on competitiveness and qualification.

Finally, the LF adopted the use of technology to empower women. The LF confirmed that LVF had procured cooler boxes for women to improve storage and increase shelf life of the fish. In addition, LVF partnered through M-SAWA with *Echo Network Africa* (ENA), a business association working with women in the fishing sector, to help address the issue of jaboja. Due to their GAP and related activities under the M-SAWA project, the LFs have cited a positive improvement in their businesses. The improvements range from production to increased visibility. For instance, HIMILO Construction says that they have improved profitability; they have attracted more contracts as more people want to work with organizations that prioritize gender equality. This has led to an increase in income and staff salaries, as a ripple effect of increased production. Further, the company has managed to increase women’s income and they now enjoy equal pay at par with male employees. These salary structure changes motivated employees to boost production and contributed to reduced employee turnover.

³ Recruitment was based on referrals and in a context where boat riding and fishing are considered as work for the men, men were the ones getting referred and not the women.

Acacia EPZ on the other hand reported a significant increase in collection and production of the gum from the acacia tree (their core business), which they say is attributed to the fact that they actively addressed gender inequalities in their supply chain in a progressive manner. LVF reported an increase in fish production as more women were taking part in fish farming and fishing hence increased sales and company revenues.

These findings confirm that M-SAWA's gender action plans grants, including the GEM Grants, greatly contribute to advancement of GE at the LF and SE levels, which has contributed to improving productivity and profitability resulting in a motivated work force. The assumption that creating strategic HR functions that promote gender diversity would lead to improved staff performance (efficiency and effectiveness); improve companies' productivity; and increase rates of successful staff recruitment, promotion and retention was proved to be true. The table below summarizes of the business case for gender equality advancement supported by quantitative data from M-SAWA project surveys:

LF Strategy	Creating a strategic HR function that promotes gender diversity
Business case preposition as per partner gender mainstreaming activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved staff performance (Efficiency and effectiveness) • Improved company productivity • Increased rates of successful staff recruitment, promotion and retention

LF Strategy	Creating a strategic HR function that promotes gender diversity
<p>Business case validation in relation to partner gender mainstreaming outcomes (Data as of Year 7 of the project)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52% of 1,540 small entrepreneurs surveyed (48% of which are women) reporting increase in enterprise profitability. <i>(Target – At least 75% participating small entrepreneurs surveyed, of which at least 40% are Women)</i> • 52% of 1,540 small entrepreneurs surveyed (48% of which are women) reporting increased community-economic growth. <i>(Target – At least 75% participating small entrepreneurs surveyed, of which at least 40% are Women)</i> • 49% of 1,540 small entrepreneurs surveyed, of which 46% are Women, reported an increase in their income. <i>(Target – At least 75% participating SEs surveyed, of which at least 40% are women, reporting an increase in their income)</i> • 48% (31% of which are women-led) of 104 SMEs surveyed reported increase in Net Income. <i>(Target – At least 75% participating SMEs surveyed, of which at least 40% are women-led, reporting an increase in their profit)</i> • 50% of 104 SMEs surveyed (of which 34% are Women-led) report improved profitability and competitiveness. Moreover, 87% of 104 LFs/SMEs surveyed (of which at least 55% are Women led) apply gender equitable and environmentally sustainable business practices. • In terms of SE incomes, cumulatively since inception to year 7, 49% of 1,540 SEs sampled have reported an increase in their incomes. Of those reporting increases in incomes, 46% were women SEs. • Despite the unforeseen challenges occasioned by COVID-19, the project was able to surpass its LOP target by reaching up to 46% women SEs reporting increased incomes. This is in part attributable to the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) trainings offered by a gender specialist/consultant offered to 6 LFs that targeted households to ensure both genders participate in economic activities and share in financial decision-making in their respective sectors and value chains. • 31% (17% of which are women-led) of 104 SMEs surveyed reported change in jobs created <i>(Target – At least 75% participating SMEs surveyed, of which at least 40% are women-led)</i> 51% (48% of which are women) of 1,540 SEs surveyed reported change in jobs created. <i>(Target – At least 75% participating small entrepreneurs surveyed, of which at least 40% are women)</i>

This data supports the assertion that businesses that observe gender equality at workplace enjoy improved staff performance (efficiency and effectiveness), improved company productivity and increased rates of successful staff recruitment, promotion and retention.

b) Do grant partners have the capacity to integrate gender equality and women’s economic empowerment into their work (internally or within the supply chain)? Has this changed (increased and decreased)? What led to this change?

This study finds that the GEM grant partners do have the capacity to integrate gender equality and women’s economic empowerment initiatives that generate impacts within their work. The LFs have shown steady increases in their capacity to implement gender equitable business growth plans that address systemic gender inequalities and barriers faced disproportionately by women. Other project partners received GALS grants and/or support for gender activities through their overall matching grant initiatives, gender mainstreaming training from the Gender specialists and co-developed a GAP that was updated quarterly by the partners.

Data from project annual reports indicates that 96% (54% of those surveyed were women-led) of 26 supported SMEs surveyed in Year 7 and 90% (53% of those surveyed were women-led) of 104 SMEs surveyed cumulatively since the project began to year 7 reported positive changes in their capacity to implement gender equitable business growth plans. This data demonstrates that the project surpassed the target of at least 75% participating SMEs surveyed, of which at least 40% were women-led.

In addition, 66% of 148 allied SMEs in Year 7 (47% of which are women-led) and 68% of 270 allied SMEs surveyed cumulatively, reported a positive change in their capacity to implement improved gender equitable practices as a result of their participation in joint supply chain initiatives. This surpassed the target of at least 75% allied SMEs surveyed, of which at least 40% are women-led.

Throughout the MEDA annual reports (Year 4-7) of the M-SAWA project, there is clear evidence from LFs of increasing human capital, effectively increasing their capacities to implement enhanced gender equity and economic empowerment with the aim of achieving sustainable business growth plans. The diagram below summarizes some of the key efforts towards this end:



c) Have the grants with gender objectives (i.e., the Gender Action Plans and associated activities) helped to advance gender equality among grant partners (LF/BA)?

This section seeks to establish if the implementation of grants with gender objectives helped to advance gender equality and women's empowerment among LFs/ BAs. First it is important to define two critical gender concepts: gender equality and gender integration.

Gender equality concerns women and men, and it involves working with men and boys, women and girls to bring about changes in attitudes, behaviours, roles and responsibilities at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Gender equality means more than parity in numbers or laws on the books; it

means expanding freedoms and improving overall quality of life so that equality is achieved without sacrificing gains for men and women.⁴

Gender integration on the other hand involves identifying, and then addressing gender inequalities during strategy and project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Since the roles and power relations between men and women effect how an activity is implemented, it is essential that project managers address these issues on an ongoing basis.⁵

Discussion in this section seeks to provide an evidence-based examination of whether the M-SAWA project effectively integrated gender equality issues. To answer this question, MEDA applied ADS Chapter 205 of *Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle*,⁶ focused on give key domains used in gender analysis to explain gaps between men and women that exist in households, communities, and organizations. The discussion along the five domains follows below.⁷

i. Laws, Policies, Regulations and Institutional Practices.

Laws include formal statutory laws and informal and customary legal systems. Policies and regulations include formal and informal rules and procedures adopted by public institutions for making decisions and taking public action. Institutional practices can be formal or informal and include behaviours or norms related to human resources (hiring and firing), professional conduct (workplace harassment). Laws, policies regulations and institutional practices influence the context in which men and women act and make decisions.

M-SAWA supported LFs and BAs to develop action plans and in some cases strategies or policies to guide how gender equality mainstreaming should happen at the workplace. For example, with the support of the M-SAWA project, LFs developed HR policies, gender policies and strategies, as well as HR manuals to ensure strategic HR functions that would support gender diversity. In this case, M-SAWA project was able to address gender-based constraints related to gender blind policies that women SEs and women-led LFs/SMEs continued to face due to lack of supporting legal framework.

In the Year 7 donor report for example, it was noted that the M-SAWA project supported LF Acacia to create a strategic HR function that supports GE by prioritizing hiring women for upcoming openings for field operations positions.

⁴ USAID (2012). *Gender Equality and Female Empowerment*. Accessed from: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/GenderEqualityPolicy_0.pdf

⁵ Ibid

⁶ USAID (2021). ADS Chapter 205 – *Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle*. Accessed from: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/205.pdf>

⁷ Ibid

Field operations positions are known to have more men than women because of the need to work away from home. The LFs also incorporated gender trainings in the recruitment process to curb and address unconscious gender bias among employees.⁸

ii. Cultural Norms and Beliefs

Every society has cultural norms and beliefs about what are appropriate qualities, life goals, and aspirations for men and women. Cultural norms and beliefs influence ideas around what men and women should or should not do and how men and women behave in different environments. Therefore, gender equality programs must explicitly identify these norms and beliefs at the project inception stage. The M-SAWA project was able to identify the social-cultural restrictions for women entrepreneurs and addressed them throughout the project period. The fact that there was close tracking of the performance of LFs related to addressing socio-cultural gender-based constraints affirms the deliberate effort of M-SAWA project to sustainably address gender equality.

MEDA incorporated topics examining gender and socio-cultural norms, as well as women's rights, into the gender equality trainings with project stakeholders (LFs, BAs). Project partners were also supported to incorporate these important topics into any training they provided to staff or to SEs. For instance, women were not involved in most field operations the trainings have encouraged more women to get involved in what was considered as male domain (e.g., extension officers, boat riding, fishing and fish feeding).

iii. Gender Roles, Responsibilities and Time Use.

Gender inequalities are evident in the way labour is allocated within the productive and reproductive activities. This domain examines what men and women do in these spheres, including roles, responsibilities, and time use during paid work, unpaid work (including care and other work in the home), and community service to get an accurate portrait of how people live their lives and to anticipate potential constraints to participation in development projects. Therefore, gender equality programs should address the way labour is distributed between men and women and should seek to redistribute roles and responsibilities as well address the burden of women by reducing time used during paid work and unpaid work including care work in the homes. Six LFs participated in GALS trainings funded through the GALS grants. The training contributed to a shift in household gender roles including care work, where men started supporting women, beginning to address inequalities in gender roles and responsibilities.

⁸ MEDA. M-SAWA Annual Report Year 7, Annex 7.

M-SAWA was explicit in addressing the burden of the time used on paid work for women in Lakeview Fisheries, by championing for 40 women fish traders to access subsidized cold storage boxes to ease transportation of fresh fish to the markets as well as aid in alleviating the time used to take the fish to the factories. Further HIMILO's 150 small scale artisanal miners (55 Men, 17 Women) were trained on safe and efficient production, how to sieve, separate sand from gypsum and how to grade and weigh gypsum. This practice will save the time they spend on the paid work at the quarry sites.

HIMILO was also supported to increase the number of women SEs targeted by their business to 30% and include them in loading process and supplied them with small scale handheld tools to improve production. Acacia provided gum harvesting tools to producer groups with 70% priority to women and youth. Smart Logistics on the other hand through their marketing strategies targeting women to distribute their pre-cooked products (Beansy and Frejos) would greatly reduce the time women spend looking for firewood, water and boiling beans.

iv. Access to and Control over Assets and Resources (including income, employment, and assets such as land)

This domain analyses whether women and men own and/or have access to and the capacity to use productive resources – assets (land, housing), income, and social benefits (social insurance, pensions– and information necessary to be a fully active and productive participant in society.⁹ The big question in any gender equality program is if male and female have access to and capacity to use resources especially productive resources, assets, income, social benefits, public services technologies and information.

M-SAWA project identified several gender-based constraints that the LFs and other partners were to address through the project period. The GEM assessments confirmed that:

- a) Women had limited access to financial services,
- b) There were cumbersome legal processes for business establishment and protection,
- c) Women had limited links to technology,
- d) Lack of linkages / markets to link women SEs and LFs to support their activities with market and production information.

⁹ USAID (2021). ADS Chapter 205 – *Integrating Gender Equality and Female Empowerment in USAID's Program Cycle*. Accessed from: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/205.pdf>



Lack of control of assets is often exacerbated by social norms that hamper securing collateral and the relatively weak positions of women in terms of asset ownership and control over resources and money. The most common reason for business loan rejections is a lack of acceptable collateral, which should be understood in a context where most assets – particularly land – are registered as the property of men.

In Year 5 the project supported LFs and BAs that identified access to financial services for men and women SEs, particularly women SEs, as a key constraint to improving access and control over their incomes.¹⁰ The activities implemented included scaling up digital literacy and access to information and communication technology (ICT)-based payment platforms so that producers could receive direct deposits and timely payments for their product. In addition, partners supported women producers in opening bank accounts, some for their very first time, to receive payments from LFs for their products.

¹⁰ MEDA. M-SAWA Annual Project Report Year 5, Annex7.

Further, the project facilitated increased resource availability for women (e.g., LFs increased income for women SEs and more women were able to access employment).

v. Patterns of Power and Decision-making

Gender equality means that both men and women have the ability to decide, influence and exercise control over material, human intellectual, and financial resources. To promote gender equality in the workplace, it is important to ensure that men and women are represented in senior levels of decision-making positions and share their voices in decision making. Interventions must address culturally constructed barriers which contribute to preventing women from climbing the organizational ladder, considering the specific socio-cultural factors that give rise to a leadership gap between women and men.

Cultural beliefs have led to perceptions of women as capable of taking care of domestic affairs but not economic affairs. This in spite of the fact that women generally provide the majority of labour in the agricultural sector, but do not receive a fair share of the economic benefits. The representation and participation of women in cooperatives and farmers organizations in Kenya and globally is low. Cultural gender biases are contributing to a large extent to the underrepresentation of women in cooperatives.

To help address this issue, M- SAWA supported LFs and SEs to increase the number of women represented in leadership and decision-making positions. For example, in its work with SL, 95 SEs were trained on 2/3 gender rule (outlined in a Kenyan constitution, this rule states that no more than two-thirds of the members of elective bodies shall be of the same gender) and active participation/advocacy. HIMILO strengthened women groups by offering gender training and sensitization including around governance and management of group. The SL marketing strategy also sought to empower more women in the SL organizational structure. The HR and gender policies and strategies at Acacia were explicit in ensuring balanced appointment of both male and female in managerial positions and balanced representation in high level meetings and conferences.

d) Is the M-SAWA approach to integrating gender equality into the activities of grant partners sustainable? After the project, what have grant partners put in place to continue this work? (E.g. Will gender focal persons continue to advance these objectives? Etc.)

Post-project sustainability is critical for any development intervention. The LFs have developed gender policies and strategies, and HR policies which will provide sustainability linkages that will continue to be adopted along the LFs'

supply chains. The gender policies will be reviewed continuously to inform the short-term, midterm and long-term business plans. The LFs identified and trained Gender Focal Persons which is a strategy to sustainably integrate gender responsiveness within the LFs' ongoing interventions. These representatives will be a resource to continue to raise gender issues that respective LFs need to address post-project.

More specifically, LFs have put in place the following sustainability strategies as provided below:

- LFs have secured Budgetary/Resources allocation to ensure financial support of the gender related activities,
- LFs have given budgetary consideration and allocation to some components of GEM activities and related costs as shown below:
 - E.g. HIMILO has allocated a portion of the total company budget to cater for the GEM activities and related cost. The funds are meant to offer support during women economic empowerment and financial literacy trainings; and hiring of HR to apply a gender lens across human resource policies.
 - Acacia EPZ has allocated 5% of the total budget to fund the GEM activities such as internal sensitization and hiring of the HR to streamline gender policies and factor them into the HR policies.
- To ensure that LFs have supportive legal and policy framework for implementing gender equality efforts, LFs have developed Gender and HR policies and strategies that will be useful in mainstreaming gender in the organization. This will ensure that the efforts to integrate gender equality do not remain a project but becomes a lifelong institutional mandate, regardless of who holds office.
- Further, LFs has provided continuous trainings for employees to increase gender awareness levels.
- Other efforts included formation of gender committee, gender desks, gender mainstreaming manual and gender focal point to ensure gender mainstreaming activities are well implemented.
- Finally, some LFs have ensured sustainability at the Human Resource level include creating positions and hiring HR personnel to help in aligning HR practices to the gender policy and entire organization practices.

e) Have the gender activities implemented by the grant partners made an impact on their relationship with their suppliers/clients?

If so, how? (e.g. through gender training/ support grant partners have improved their HR Policies, addressed mobility challenges for women suppliers, improved their marketing strategies, etc.).

Report findings from Year 7 and 6, through gender equality impact assessments which were completed by MEDA for the targeted LFs (namely Lakeview Fisheries, Acacia, Smart Logistics and HIMILO Construction) found that these companies implemented gender activities that have resulted in a positive relationship with their clients and suppliers.¹¹

By the end of year 6 of project implementation, 100% of 19 stakeholders interviewed in Year 6 and 87% of 78 stakeholders cumulatively reported positive perception regarding the capacity of SMEs to implement gender equitable sustainable growth plans. Majority of the stakeholders speak positively about the intervention.

f) Have the gender activities implemented by the grant partners made an impact on their internal operations? If so, how? (E.g. through gender training/ support grant partners have improved their HR policies, developed and implemented a gender policy etc.).

One of the key outcomes of GE integration in any program is to reduce gender disparities. In addition, GE integration should increase the capabilities of women to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes and influence decision making in households, communities and institutions. M-SAWA supported LFs to implement a strategic HR function that supports, assesses, and mainstreams gender equality within field operations.

The implementation of this activity impacted internal operations through reviews of job descriptions, inclusion of fair compensation in the HR Policy Manual, and developing a mechanism to create a culture of documenting feedback after an appraisal process. This is a clear indicator that implementing gender responsive activities by the LFs greatly impacted the internal operations. To provide a concrete example, the table below demonstrates the extent to which grantees adjusted their internal operations as a result of their GEM Framework assessments and action plans using the examples of Smart Logistics, Acacia and Himilo:

¹¹ MEDA. M-SAWA Annual Report – Year 7. Reports from previous years (4-6) were also reviewed to gather data on the impact of gender activities on client/supplier relationships.

Grantee	ADJUSTMENTS OF INTERNAL OPERATIONS	Impact of gender activities on the internal operations
SMART LOGISTICS	Marketing Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging more women in purchasing process of the nutritious and easy to cook products • Engaging more women in the marketing structure • Empowering more women in the organizational structure • Conducting market research targeting more women • In store promotional campaigns to measure customer experience of the products • Examine key business performance indicators like sales volume and profit margin disaggregated by women and men • Product rebranding strategy to attract more women customers
ACACIA	Developed Gender Policy and strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure balance appointment of both male and female in managerial positions • Ensure representation of women in high levels meetings, training and conferences • Ensure intolerance to Sexual exploitation and abuse, harassment, and abuse of authority • Ensure open and direct communication or suggestion box to report sensitive matters e.g., exploitation and abuse of power • Top management investigates sexual exploitation and abuse at workplace • Provide maternity and paternity leave according to law • 70% target for women and youth in gender sensitization and gum harvesting tools supply • Monitoring of negative and positive gender and social impact of the company's activities among the collectors • Communicate all expectations on gender equality to all suppliers and collectors

Grantee	ADJUSTMENTS OF INTERNAL OPERATIONS	Impact of gender activities on the internal operations
HIMILO	Developed gender policy and strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give training to raise awareness and promote fair behaviours. • Provide childcare facilities, family-friendly policies and childcare vouchers. • Shine a spotlight on successful women in our company, both internally and through media channels and ask senior women to act as mentors. • Establish policies for fair pay and work/life balance, and ensure managers fully support them. • Identify and prevent unconscious bias while hiring. • Put equality policies in place.

g) Have the recommendations from the GEM Framework assessment been integrated into the grant partners businesses effectively? If not, why? If so, are these activities improving their business activities?

The GEM assessment recommendations have been effectively integrated into the grant partners' operations through capacity building and addressing the gender-based constraints. Offering financial literacy trainings to mitigate the access to financial services by women entrepreneurs effectively increased their capacity. This was achieved through providing mentorship to targeted businesses, increasing access to capital, increased investment of businesses in their own growth through implementing matching grants as well as supporting the development and implementation of gender action plans.

GEM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH LF	CUMULATIVE ACHIEVEMENT OF LFs AGAINST THE GEM ASSESSEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Smart Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a strategic HR function that promotes gender diversity • Conduct market research and develop marketing strategy targeting women clients • Mainstream gender equality within the supply chain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of staff on gender awareness • Training SEs on 2/3 gender rule and active participation/ advocacy • Gender policy finalized • 18 women’s groups were contacted as suppliers and supported to increase their capacity to supply to the firm, thus increasing their incomes • 21 women groups were contacted as suppliers and supported to increase their capacity to supply to the firm thus increasing their income
<p>Acacia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a strategic HR function that supports gender equality • Assess and maintain gender equality within field operations • Mainstream gender equality within the supply chain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of 750 Women and 250 Men on leadership and governance and encouraging more women to participate/contest for leadership positions • A HR review of job descriptions, inclusion of fair compensation in the HR Policy Manual, and feedback process. • GEM within AEZPL internal and field operations. The consultant trained AEPZL staff on gender in March 2022
<p>Lakeview Fisheries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a strategic HR function that supports gender equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 women groups sensitized on gender representation in the fishery management • Strategic partnership with ECHO, KEFEADO, ENA network Africa to empower women in the fish value chain • Sensitized and helped women farmers sign contracts • 40 women fish traders accessed subsidized cold storage boxes to ease transportation of fresh fish to the markets

GEM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH LF	CUMULATIVE ACHIEVEMENT OF LFs AGAINST THE GEM ASSESSEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>HIMILO Construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply gender lens across HR policies and practices • Boost women’s’ representation on the board and formalise governance practices • Maintain gender diversity within the supply chain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training artisanal miners on safe and efficient production including how to sieve and separate sand from gypsum and how to grade and weigh gypsum • A gender mainstreaming training manual developed with several topics, including: Gender concepts, gender analysis, SGBV and gender responsive planning and commitments.

h) Did the GEM grants contribute to shifting the perspective of grant partners on the benefits of advancing gender equality for their businesses?

The Year 7 annual report noted that 84% of 24 SMEs surveyed spoke positively about project’s contribution in increasing targeted women and men small entrepreneurs’ enterprise profitability and application of gender-equitable sustainable practices. *(Target – Majority of the stakeholders interviewed (e.g. entrepreneurs, project partners) speak positively about project’s contribution in increasing targeted Women and men entrepreneur’s enterprise profitability and application of gender equitable and environmentally sustainable practices).*

84% of 24 SMEs surveyed speak positively about project’s contribution in increasing targeted women and men small entrepreneurs’ regarding community economic growth and application of gender-equitable and environmentally sustainable practices. *(Target – Majority of the stakeholders interviewed (e.g. entrepreneurs, project partners) speak positively about project’s contribution in increasing targeted Women and men community economic growth and application of gender equitable and environmentally sustainable practices).*

i) How could the gender support (i.e. development/implementation of Gender Action Plans or GEM grants) provided by the M-SAWA project be improved in future programs?

The LFs that were contacted to give their views had the following suggestions on improving the gender mainstreaming work:

- Continued support of the gender focal points would be of great help to sustain the momentum of the gender mainstreaming work at the LFs and SEs level.

- Establishment of the gender auditing systems at the LF level for continuous assessment and improvement
- Train the LFs on gender responsive budgeting so that gender budgeting is considered a score area for the LFs
- Continuous networking among the LFs to learn from each other on the best practices on gender-related activities.
- Develop a system to recognize/reward LFs with best practices on gender-related activities and programming

5. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

This paper reveals various lessons that future and ongoing program work should learn from.

- a) Continuous gender analysis is an integral part of implementing a sustainable gender equality mainstreaming project like M-SAWA. While gender analysis was completed in M-SAWA, the initial gender assessment of the project's targeted value chains as well as more in-depth assessments such as the GEM Assessments were completed at a later stage in the project which contributed greatly to the project team's learning and adjustment during the project period. A detailed gender analysis should be part and parcel of the project conceptualization and inception stage, as well as deeper partner-specific gender assessments conducted at the baseline and endline of each partner grant. Gender analysis should be conducted early in the conceptualisation and inception of the project.
- b) Any one program that seeks to invest in gender equality must first invest in activities that raise women's capabilities and productivity by ensuring access to and control over resources, reduced workloads by promoting gender responsive climate smart technologies and practices, workplace equity and diversity, supply chain, products and services that cater for the needs of women and promotion of gender inclusive value chains.
- c) When we engage all stakeholders including men and boys, women and girls and other strategic right holders, more sustainable results in gender equality integration will be realized (e.g., Gender Focal Persons,

engaging men as Gender Equality champions, partnership with women rights organizations to hold community dialogues etc.)

- d) It is critical to acknowledge that women are not a monolithic group who are not dealing with one set of challenges and constraints. While the Gender Action Plans as well as GEM Assessments identified gender-based constraints women face at the LF and project levels, there is need to apply an intersectional approach¹² to identify specific needs, challenges, and constraints of different classes of women in the various value chains (E.g. when we say women-led LFs and BAs, who are these women?). To ensure that all women are involved, intersectional approach is recommended in identifying and developing gender integration action plans strategies and gender responsive activities
- e) Continuous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data helps in building evidence of successful practices. This can be done at baseline, midline and endline of the project. The results should not be sugar coated; gender impacts take a long time to be achieved.
- f) Women at the grassroots level have business models that are already working for them. It is critical to listen to these woman actively so as to identify their priorities as well as existing strategies. For example, Smart Logistics utilised grassroots women's business models by considering products that resonate with women, as well as channels that work for women (e.g. women in a village might be able to advise companies on the type of model the company could use to sell their product to them). It is important to consider their opinions as consumers, taking a whole supply chain perspective
- g) It is important to build the capacity of partner staff in technical and non-technical areas as it was challenging at times for SME staff to grasp and understand the project objectives and approach. M-SAWA took the opportunity to train and build the capacity of these partner staff not only to manage the MEDA project but in skills that will be applicable to their work. Report writing skills were enhanced especially financial and on gender impacts and disaggregating the data by age and sex.
- h) Due to the vast geographical area of project implementation, MEDA opened two satellite offices in Kisumu and Mombasa respectively in addition to the local head office in Nairobi, to increase proximity to

¹² An intersectional approach is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppressions and privileges. This is because women live multiple layered identities from social relations, history and operations of the structure of power.

clients. This decision meant that the offices were closer to the project areas of operation and made it easier to engage women directly.

- i) Importance was placed on understanding the culture of the communities engaged by the project in order to successfully incorporate men and women into the project. The M-SAWA project was deliberate and intentional in incorporating both men and women into the market system in a manner that was culturally appropriate, while addressing social and cultural norms that may inhibit women from equally participating in the economy alongside men. This was done to increase women's and household earning potential while also reducing conflicts in households, particularly those headed by men. The project required the participation of both men and women to produce the desired results, with a deliberate focus on women's economic empowerment to leverage opportunities particularly for rural women. The GALS approach was critical in supporting this goal and should be included for all LFs in future projects to help tackle gender inequalities at the household level where they are perpetuated.

6. GESI AREAS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

The following areas have been recommended for further inquiry with regards to the impact of M-SAWA:

- i. Investigate if there have been shifts in gender roles, responsibilities and time use as a result of the M-SAWA project. This includes looking at how work has been allocated at the LF, SE level and household level. Specifically, investigate how gender activities addressed the division of labour around unpaid care work as the report shows that the project led to creation of jobs for women which can add to women's existing labour burden if the distribution of work within the home does not change.
- ii. The report has established that the gender activities increased profitability of the LF enterprises. It would be useful to establish how the increase in company profitability was felt by men and women within the value chain and how this profitability was reflected in household economy. Establish who has access and control over the resources at the household level and who has the decision-making power over the resources.

- iii. Evaluate the impact of gender training at the household level, e.g. do men who have received gender training through the Lead Firms involve their spouses in decision making?
- iv. It is important to evaluate the monolithic position of women by unpacking how different classes of women intersect with the impact of the project. It is critical to evaluate the impact of empowerment on categories of women including the poor, vulnerable, (un)educated, rural and urban, etc.
- v. Document the possible unexpected project-induced gender biases and inequalities which could have resulted from the gender activities of the M-SAWA project. For example, what happens when more women move into the workforce especially into men-dominant sections of value chains? Does moving women into male-dominant job categories expose women to certain vulnerabilities if safeguards are not in place or if existing norms are ignored (e.g. moving women into shift work, how is this perceived by their spouses? Risks of sexual and gender-based violence?). This could include aggression or resentment from fellow men at the workplace, or from spouses at home because women have stepped outside of their traditional roles
- vi. Identify the specific LFs (beyond those surveyed for this study) who have added budgetary allocation to gender-related activities post M-SAWA project as a sustainability strategy for gender mainstreaming interventions.
- vii. There is a need to determine how many gender focal persons were able to continue in their role beyond the life of M-SAWA. It would be reflective of true transformation if these methods exist beyond the project. The project's final evaluation should look at how gender focal persons at the LFs level can be supported to sustain the work, considering that gender work is not easy as it goes against the norms and practices.
- viii. Determine what gender-related training content was the most useful/interesting for the Lead Firms, and which of the content was the most adaptable by them and why.

7. CONCLUSION

Integrating gender equality in development programs is critical in achieving prosperity for all. This paper underscores MEDAs and GAC efforts and commitment to narrowing the gender gap that exists between men and women in the agriculture, construction and extractives sectors through M-SAWA. MEDA is committed to improving the status of women and girls by engaging men and strategic stakeholders including SMEs and SEs. Empowering women and girls to realize their full potential and become market leaders of the future generation in a sustainable way. MEDA's position, supported through the findings of this study, is that SMES and SEs that prioritise, elevate and empower women create strong communities, stable economies and resilience countries and long-lasting positive change. Investing in women is critical in sustaining self-reliance in the communities in Kenya and globally, supporting the business case for gender equality and women's economic empowerment.





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