



# WOMEN AS BUSINESS PARTNERS

Photo: Marjolein Hammink/ICCO

## IMPROVED YIELDS

Evidence shows that enabling women to have equal access to inputs, services, and land improves yields. It also shows that female farmers often pay greater attention than men to crop quality and that productivity increases as a result of increasing their access to technical training. If your suppliers are smallholders, it is important to realize that men and women often perform different, but equally important tasks

on the farm as a family business. Distinctively recognizing the added value of women in agricultural production, manufacturing and processing makes it possible to improve women's capacities and strengthen their qualities. This in return results in better productivity, effectiveness and efficiency for the company to become more competitive. Besides, it builds a positive company image and reduces a company's risk of sudden reputational damage.

## WOMEN AS BUSINESS PARTNERS?

The women's roles often remain hidden as the majority of spokespersons in communication with companies are male. Being aware of the real conditions of women in your value chain means engaging in a constructive dialogue that drives continual improvement for both men and women. What could you do or do better?

*You can find suggestions in the box GUIDELINES and tips below.*

## GUIDELINES

Tool for gender inclusive development and assessment of Fresh & Ingredients project proposals

Levels of addressing gender	<p><i>IDH Questions:</i> IDH will check if these questions are answered in your proposal</p> <p><i>Suggestions for applicant action:</i> Will guide the applicant to answer these questions in the proposal</p>
<p><b>WOMEN AS A BUSINESS PARTNER</b> Is the company explicit about including women in the business strategy? Does the company have a track record in this regard?</p>	<p><i>IDH Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What vision does the company have with regards to the role of women in their business strategy?</li> <li>• Is the company aware of the different roles of men and women in its business strategy and the value of both roles?</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggestions for applicant action</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read introduction (p1) of these guidelines for ideas and suggestions on 'Women as business partner in F&amp;I supported projects'</li> </ul>
<p><b>TARGET GROUP</b> Will women benefit from this project? Are specific women business partners identified? Does the company have a strategy regards female employees?</p>	<p><i>IDH Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At what level will women have a place in the business strategy:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- as employee (more or better quality employment?) or</li> <li>- as producers in the supply chain of the company (e.g. sourcing, contract schemes)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• How will women participate and benefit of the business proposal?</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggestions for applicant action</i></p> <p>Analyze your employee base systematically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many women do you employ at what positions? Temporarily or permanent? In technical positions, in management positions?</li> </ul> <p>Analyze your sourcing strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you source from women farmers/ entrepreneurs?</li> <li>• How do women contribute to the quality of your product and the success of your company?</li> </ul>

- ### SUPPLY CHAIN RELIABILITY
- Communicate with male and female members of the household as a family business.
  - Provide extension services, technical training and other inputs in such a way that addresses the needs of both male and female farmers e.g. by recruiting female as well as male extension staff
  - Actively source from women small-holders (female headed households) in your supply chain
  - Make sure that contract farming schemes are accessible for both male and female farmers.

- ### ACCESSING UNTAPPED EMPLOYEE TALENT
- Have a fair and unbiased wage system
  - Offer equal opportunities for men and women to permanent jobs and management positions.
  - Support human resource development and skills training for women.
  - Prohibit and prevent all forms of violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.
  - Ensure there are separate toilets and showers for female and male employees
  - Promoting work-life balance (e.g. working hours, maternity leave).
  - Consider supporting access to childcare.
  - Have in place an effective grievance mechanism for workers.

## GUIDELINES

Tool for gender inclusive development and assessment of Fresh & Ingredients project proposals

Levels of addressing gender	<p><i>IDH Questions:</i> IDH will check if these questions are answered in your proposal</p> <p><i>Suggestions for applicant action:</i> Will guide the applicant to answer these questions in the proposal</p>
<p><b>OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM</b> How will women benefit?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will women get increased access to resources: Income, Skill Development, More or Better Jobs</li> <li>Will their ability to make use/ benefit of these resources be improved: Decision-making, Time-use, Mobility (Self-) Esteem</li> </ul>	<p><i>IDH Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are objectives formulated how women can benefit of this business proposal?</li> <li>Do women (only) participate, or do they also genuinely benefit of the project?</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggestions for applicant action</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the constraints faced by your women business partners and female employees</li> <li>Analyze the consequences of these constraints for your company and for the women</li> <li>Look for actions creating a win-win for your company and for women</li> <li>Pay special attention to constraints that are specific for women</li> </ul>
<p><b>THE APPROACH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are communication channels established with women?</li> <li>Are services developed addressing the specific needs and possibilities of women?</li> <li>Is the approach evaluated with women?</li> </ul>	<p><i>IDH Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the business strategy explicit about how women will be addressed?</li> <li>Is this strategy likely to be successful?</li> <li>Are risks for women identified and dealt with?</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggestions for applicant action</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for strategies including women in your sector and apply the lessons learned (look at the Further Reading section of these guidelines)</li> <li>Make a risk assessment with special attention for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploitation of women</li> <li>Health and safety risks (e.g. related to reproductive health and sexual harassment)</li> <li>Work burden of women</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>EXPERTISE</b> It there gender expertise present in the project team?</p>	<p><i>IDH Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the company clear about the gender expertise to be used to make the business strategy successful in involving women?</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggestions for applicant action</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involve gender expertise in an early stage, already when designing your project plan</li> <li>Ensure gender expertise during the implementation of your plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign this responsibility to a staff member or consider involving a consultant in the country where you work</li> <li>Cooperate with a national or international NGO with experience in this field</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>BUDGET</b> Is budget reserved for activities to engage women as business partners?</p>	<p><i>IDH Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is budget reserved for the strategy to include women in the project?</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggestions for applicant action</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As for any business strategy involving women requires specific activities to be budgeted for, include them!</li> <li>Develop a plan to be able to monitor the financial benefits of these activities, allowing you to calculate Return on Investment (investing in women is not only a cost but, if well done, pays back!)</li> </ul>

## FURTHER READING

### Best Practice

15 accessible case descriptions of good practices in 'Women as inclusive business partners', by BoP Inc, based on lessons learned from Dutch and international companies, ranging from SMEs or cooperatives to multinational corporations. <http://bopininnovationcenter.com/our-projects/our-projects/women-as-inclusive-business-partners>

### Toolkit

Toolkit on Gender in value chains, developed by AgriProFocus, ICCO and Hivos. It provides tools for every stage in the project cycle, and tool 4.3 (page 106-119) addresses gender strategies of companies. Downloadable from <http://agriprofocus.com/toolkit>.

The Sustainable Coffee Program, Hivos and AgriProFocus powered by IDH produced a toolkit to address the inequalities of women and youth in the coffee supply chain in relation to access to training, land ownership, inputs and income. This toolkit provides practical approaches and tools for companies and practitioners. Downloadable from [www.sustainablecoffeeprogram.com/en/resources](http://www.sustainablecoffeeprogram.com/en/resources)

### Knowledge Portal

The Food and Business Knowledge platform provides evidence on the importance of closing the gender gap in agriculture and the food system. For tools on gender analysis and innovative approaches to eradicate gender inequality in see: <http://knowledge4food.net/knowledge-portal/gender/>

### CONTACT

Upon your request ICCO Cooperation and Fair & Sustainable Advisory Services (FSAS) can help to improve on supply chain reliability and provide guidance or suggestions on how to apply the guidelines and develop your proposal in a gender sensitive way.

For further information please contact:  
leonard.zijlstra@icco-cooperation.org or  
jochem.schneemann@fairandsustainable.nl

Developed by ICCO Cooperation and FSAS, in cooperation with IDH.

