



Gender-forward business practices for digital platforms:

A supply-side exploration

July 2022

by Value for Women and Caribou Digital
in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation



This report is part of an overall research study on women and platform livelihoods in Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria. All reports can be found at www.platformlivelihoods.com.

For questions about this report, please contact Renée Hunter at rhunter@v4w.org.

For questions about the overall research, please contact Savita Bailur at savita@cariboudigital.net.

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Value for Women (VfW) is a women-led global social enterprise that works closely with partners to design and implement research, technical assistance programs, evaluations, tools and blended capacity-building initiatives in Africa, Asia and Latin America focused on impact investing and the small and medium enterprise (SME) space. VfW helps organizations to advance gender inclusion. We believe that women are key drivers of economic and social growth, and that women's inclusion is essential for better business outcomes. We identify and test new solutions that foster inclusion while unlocking the powerful economic potential that women hold. Specifically, we support investors seeking business and social returns in diverse sectors, such as finance, agriculture, and clean energy by providing research and technical advisory support.

Caribou Digital is a research and advisory firm that seeks to change the world by helping organizations build inclusive and ethical digital economies. All Caribou Digital reports are available at cariboudigital.net.

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Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of an exploration of gender-forward business practices for digital platforms, as well as an innovative Gender Lens Survey that was adapted and piloted to assess the performance of digital platforms in a scalable, accessible, and engaging way.

Over the course of 2021, Caribou Digital, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, undertook a study to investigate the experiences of young women earning livelihoods on digital platforms in Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria. Qualitative research was undertaken in each of the three countries. Through interviews with women platform workers, insights about their experiences and challenges were highlighted, culminating in a better understanding of how platforms might best contribute to women's livelihoods.

The findings from the qualitative research into the experiences of women on digital platforms are published in three separate reports in this series:

- [*Women and Platform Livelihoods: Lessons from Ghana*](#)
- [*Different Shades of Women in Platform Livelihoods: Stories of Resilience and Empowerment from Kenya*](#)
- [*Platform Livelihoods and Young Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria*](#)

Accompanying the individual, country-level insights derived from interviews with women platform workers, Value for Women examined possible strategies for increasing the levels of gender inclusion, and thus potential for gender equality, from the perspective of digital platforms themselves.

Value for Women explored what gender-forward business practices might look like for digital platforms specifically; how to assess these practices in a meaningful way; and specific examples of how individual platforms are implementing such practices. This issue is not only meaningful from an ethical and human rights point of view, but has tangible implications for businesses' bottom line. Businesses with more gender-diverse leadership tend to outperform their peers financially and benefit from increased innovation.¹ Through better serving women as customers, businesses stand to increase their sales and income—a difference especially relevant to digital platforms, as women customers are more likely to stick to online shopping once converted.² Finally, by focusing on women as workers or e-commerce sellers, digital platforms stand to increase revenue through those users; estimates show that African e-commerce can increase by US\$15 billion by 2030 if activities of women sellers are increased to match those of men.³

1 Montilla, "Top Three Reasons We Need More Women in Tech."

2 IFC, Women and E-commerce in Africa.

3 IFC, Women and E-commerce in Africa.

A gender-forward business is defined as one that intentionally seeks to address gender inequalities by providing goods and services that close gender gaps or meet the needs of women or girls; supports gender diversity through internal policies and practices in the workplace; and/or strengthens inclusion and diversity along the value chain.⁴ Gender-forward business practices are the strategies, approaches, and practices that such businesses use to address gender inequalities.

Value for Women adapted its existing and proprietary Gender Smart Nexus Gender Lens Survey (see below) as a pilot to form a unique and innovative tool to assess and score the gender-forward business practices employed by digital platforms. This Gender Lens Survey is different from other assessments of (inclusive) business or platform operations, as it includes a deliberate focus on *gender-forward practices* and can be completed by businesses independently, without requiring lengthy projects or in-depth assessments by external parties. An online survey guides platforms through thorough questions about their business practices, including 1) overall strategy and gender commitment; 2) leadership, workforce, and HR; 3) market research, product development, marketing, and sales; 4) customer finance, service, and support; 5) worker attraction, retention, and support; and 6) the use of sex-disaggregated data. Following completion of the survey, each respondent receives a personalized report with an overall gender inclusion score, scores per business area, and directly applicable recommendations for more gender-inclusive business practices.

Box 1

VfW's Gender Smart Nexus

The Gender Smart Nexus is Value for Women's holistic platform for gender assessments, benchmarking, and decision-making. It is a digital platform that helps enterprises, investors, and business support organizations assess, take action, and make business and investment decisions that take gender into account. The platform hosts a number of functions and tools: a Gender Lens Survey for Enterprises, a Gender Lens Investing Survey for investors, aggregated Gender Lens Portfolio Analysis, and an Employee Satisfaction and Organizational Culture Survey, among others. These various tools aim to offer pathways for businesses and investors to move from inspiration to action quickly and more efficiently—going beyond assessments of current performance into targeted recommendations for future actions.

For the purposes of this project, Value for Women made platform-specific adaptations to the Gender Lens Survey for Enterprises.

The Gender Smart Nexus Gender Lens Survey compares favorably to other tools on the following fronts:

- **Scalability:** The assessment requires little to no support from researchers to complete. With semi-automated scoring and report development, it is possible to give relatively in-depth support to a large number of businesses or platforms with relatively limited resources.
- **Accessibility:** Given the virtual nature of the assessment, participants can take the assessment at a time that best suits them and can take the assessment in pieces and save their progress to return at a later date.
- **Engagement:** Participants may independently complete the assessment and receive immediately relevant and implementable recommendations for their business, taking into consideration their current performance and business priorities.

The pilot assessment was completed by seven respondents—all representatives of digital platforms in Nigeria and Kenya. Their answers generally indicate an understanding of the importance of gender equality overall and articulate, in principle, a commitment to contributing to greater gender equality. However, *these ambitions are generally not backed up with practical policies, practices or strategies*. Specifically:

- Respondents do not back up stated commitments to inclusive HR values with formal policies.
- While respondents indicate a commitment to gender inclusion in the workplace, there is limited gendered understanding or acknowledgement of gendered differences in other business functions (such as marketing, product design, or customer support).
- Respondents are *slightly* more likely to consider gendered differences in their customers than their workers or providers.
- A missed opportunity presents itself in the form of data—both about customers and workers or providers. Such data on platform users (ratings, earnings, number of jobs/trips/sales, complaints, product preferences, frequency and timing of logging in, etc.) is critical for digital platforms to run their business and can be hugely beneficial to improve their offerings and efficiencies overall. Respondents to this assessment, however, generally indicated limited availability of sex-disaggregated data on customers and workers.
- Where respondents did consider gendered differences in various business areas, they reported seeing positive business impacts as a result. The various kinds of business improvements reported include increased sales, improved brand recognition, increased customer satisfaction, and increased employee satisfaction and retention.

Based on these findings, this report recommends four initial steps toward more gender-forward business practices digital platforms should focus on. These are considered low-hanging fruit, as they represent a relatively limited departure from current practices and can be achieved with relatively limited resources. These recommendations include:

- 1 Improve sex-disaggregated data collection, analysis, and use.** This will enable digital platforms to gain a better picture of gendered differences in, for example, issues raised by platform workers, which in turn allows a business to proactively push support or information to the group that most needs it.
- 2 Draft and publish a gender commitment statement.** This sends a clear signal to all platform stakeholders and can be beneficial in engaging possible investors.
- 3 Ensure all strategy and market research is done in a sex-disaggregated manner.** This will enable digital platforms to better target their design and marketing to the important segment of women customers.
- 4 Take gendered differences into account when providing worker training and support.** For example, the IFC found that women sellers on Jumia showed greater appreciation and uptake of business management tools than their men counterparts—which can have greater impact on their e-commerce business success.⁵

Finally, for ecosystem stakeholders (either working with, influencing, or supporting digital platforms), recommendations include:

- **Increase advocacy** around the importance and business benefits of gender-forward business practices for digital platforms.
- **Encourage businesses to complete a gender self-assessment** as a starting point to identify gaps and areas for improvement.
- **Earmark funding** for gender-forward pilots within digital platforms.
- **Encourage the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data** by digital platforms.

⁵ IFC, *Women and E-commerce in Africa*.

1 Project background

Over the course of 2021, Caribou Digital, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, undertook a study to investigate the experiences of young women earning livelihoods on digital platforms in Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria.

Qualitative research was undertaken in each of the three countries. Through interviews with women platform workers, insights about their experiences and challenges were highlighted, culminating in a better understanding of how platforms might best contribute to women's livelihoods.

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Accompanying the individual, country-level insights derived from interviews with women platform workers, Value for Women examined possible strategies for increasing the levels of gender inclusion, and thus potential for gender equality, from the perspective of digital platforms themselves.

Box 2

A note on terminology

Digital platforms are virtual marketplaces that connect providers of goods and services with consumers.⁶ Common examples are e-commerce or online shopping, ride-hailing or e-hailing, virtual freelance marketplaces, or marketplaces facilitating the rental of assets, like homes.

The multi-sided nature of digital platforms refers to the fact that two or more distinct groups of users can be connected through these businesses.⁷ Whereas “traditional businesses” (see below) are two-sided—the provider of goods and services on one hand and consumers on the other—multi-sided digital platforms have at least three sets of stakeholders: platform business, platform workers or providers of goods and services, and consumers. Depending on the type of platform, there can be even more sets of



⁶ Cenfri, *Africa's Digital Platforms and Financial Services: An Eight-Country Overview*.

⁷ Cenfri, *Africa's Digital Platforms and Financial Services*.

stakeholders. Consider, for example, food delivery platforms, which entail 1) the platform business, 2) consumers, 3) restaurants (the providers of food), and 4) delivery partners (the providers of the delivery service).

Platform workers or providers are those who provide the goods and services sold on the platform—those who earn platform livelihoods through working, trading, renting, or engaging in digital marketplaces.⁸

Traditional business models, in this report, refer to non-platform businesses—businesses that consist of two sides: a provider of goods or services and their consumers.

Women's economic empowerment refers to “*the transformative process that helps women move from limited power, voice and choice at home and in the economy to having the skills, resources and opportunities needed to compete equitably in markets as well as the agency to control and benefit from economic gains.*”⁹

A gender-forward business is any business that intentionally seeks to address gender inequalities by providing goods and services that close gender gaps or meet the needs of women or girls; supporting gender diversity through internal policies and practices in the workforce; or strengthening inclusion and diversity across the value chain.¹⁰ **Gender-forward business practices** are the strategies, approaches, and practices that such gender-forward businesses utilize to address gender inequalities.

In the context of the methodology, the investigation through a **demand-side lens** refers to the perspective of individual users—those individuals who earn a livelihood through digital platforms. The **supply-side lens** investigates the perspective and actions of the digital platforms themselves, at a company level.

8 Qhala and Caribou Digital, “Platform Livelihoods Framework.”

9 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, “Equal Is Greater.”

10 Value for Women, *How to Invest with a Gender Lens*.

Value for Women adapted its existing and proprietary Gender Smart Nexus Gender Lens Survey (see Box 3) as a pilot, to form a unique and innovative assessment tool to assess and score the gender-forward business practices employed by digital platforms themselves. This Gender Lens Survey is different from other assessments of (inclusive) business or platform operations, as it includes a deliberate focus on *gender-forward* practices and can be completed by businesses independently, without requiring lengthy projects or in-depth assessments by external parties. An online survey guides platforms through thorough questions about their business practices, including 1) overall strategy and gender commitment; 2) leadership, workforce, and HR; 3) market research, product development, marketing, and sales; 4) customer finance, service, and support; 5) worker attraction, retention, and support; and 6) the use of sex-disaggregated data. **Following completion of the survey, each respondent receives a personalized report with an overall gender inclusion score, scores per business area, and directly applicable recommendations for more gender-inclusive business practices.**

Box 3**VfW's Gender Smart Nexus**

The Gender Smart Nexus is Value for Women's holistic platform for gender assessments, benchmarking, and decision-making. It is a digital platform that helps enterprises, investors, and business support organizations assess, take action, and make business and investment decisions that take gender into account. The platform hosts a number of functions and tools: a Gender Lens Survey for Enterprises, a Gender Lens Investing Survey, aggregated Gender Lens Portfolio Analysis, and an Employee Satisfaction and Organizational Culture Survey, among others. These various tools aim to offer pathways for businesses and investors to move from inspiration to action quickly and more efficiently—going beyond assessments of current performance into targeted recommendations for future actions.

For the purposes of this project, Value for Women made platform-specific adaptations to the Gender Lens Survey for enterprises.

Based on an existing understanding of gender-forward business practices in traditional (non-platform) business models, Value for Women tailored the Gender Lens Survey for enterprises to suit the multi-sided nature of digital platform businesses. This report outlines this assessment and shares the findings of a pilot assessment among seven digital platforms in Nigeria and Kenya. The objectives of this study are as follows:

- Explore a framework of gender-forward business practices for digital platforms.
- Pilot a gender self-assessment for digital platforms, which might be applied more broadly in future exercises.
- Explore potential gaps and opportunities for action to be taken by digital platforms, including identifying those that can be achieved with minimal work (“low-hanging fruit”).

1.1 Methodology

The Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms is based on Value for Women’s proprietary Gender Smart Nexus Gender Lens Survey methodology (see Box 3), for an initial assessment of a company’s gendered practices.¹¹ The purpose of this tool is to assess the presence and depth of gender-forward business practices and to make practical recommendations for improvements. The assessment guides businesses through questions about their core business areas, including 1) overall strategy and gender commitment; 2) leadership, workforce, and HR; 3) market research, product development, marketing, and sales; 4) customer finance, service, and support; 5) value chain interactions; and 6) the use of (sex-disaggregated) data. Following completion of the assessment, each respondent receives a personalized report with summarized responses and directly applicable recommendations based on priorities and current practices.

Traditional businesses have only two sides to their model: the business and the customer. Digital platforms have three. The assessment was tailored to this multi-sided nature of digital platform businesses.

This assessment is different from other assessments of (inclusive) platform operations, as it includes a deliberate focus on *gender-forward* practices (this gender focus is absent in other existing frameworks), and it can be completed by businesses independently, without requiring long engagements or in-depth assessment of platform data by external parties. Figure 1 compares the developed tool with other existing gender assessments.

Respondents complete the online assessment independently with limited to no support, consisting of written instructions. This makes the methodology more scalable, accessible, and engageable for the target users:

- **Scalable:** Relatively few resources are required for each additional platform that completes the assessment, as opposed to resource-intensive methodologies that might require a team to assess each platform directly.
- **Accessible:** Platforms may opt to take the assessment at a time that best suits them; the assessment requires only approximately 20 to 30 minutes; and platforms can save their progress and return at a later date, should they need to look up the information required for certain questions.
- **Engageable:** Platforms may independently complete the assessment and receive immediately relevant and implementable recommendations for their business, in the form of a individual report that can be shared with multiple company stakeholders.

All data collected through this methodology is in the form of self-reported figures provided by the responding platforms, which is not validated through triangulation with annual reports or the like. All data presented in this report from this assessment originates from these self-reported figures, and the quotes provided originate from responses to open questions.

11 Value for Women, “Gender Smart Nexus.”

▼ Figure 1: VfW's Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms compared with other gender assessment tools and frameworks

	Support required	Time required	Publicly accessible	Report and recommendations for respondents	Comparable score?	Specific to digital platforms?	Inclusion of gender considerations
Value for Women's Gender Smart Nexus – Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms	Written instructions	20–30 minutes	The assessment for traditional business models is freely accessible, and plans are underway to make the assessment for digital platforms freely available in the near future.	Yes, including benchmark reports	Yes, overall Gender Inclusion score and a score per business area	Yes	Gender-specific
Fairwork Principles	Research endeavor—Scoring Lead and research team investigate platforms and confirm scores.	n/a	Platforms can indicate their interest in a voluntary Fairwork assessment via the website. The principles are publicly available.	Yes, including benchmark reports	Yes, validated Fairwork score	Yes	No
Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP)	Written instructions	10 minutes	Yes, principles are publicly available.	No	No, companies can become signatories only	No	Gender-specific
2X Challenge	Written instructions	10 minutes	Yes, principles are publicly available.	No	Yes, a business is either 2X-aligned or not	No	Gender-specific

Box 4**Notes on challenges, representation, and interpretation**

The intention of this study is to explore what such gender-forward practices might look like for digital platforms and to move closer to an understanding of pertinent low-hanging fruit and recommendations. It was not intended to result in a nationally or regionally representative overview of current gender-forward practices among digital platforms. The target sample, therefore, was ten local digital platforms.

Although over 350 digital platforms across Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana were contacted, only seven solid responses were received. The following factors likely contributed to this:

- Most local African digital platforms (those founded in Africa, not international platforms that are active there, such as Uber or Airbnb) are in very early stages of company growth.¹² Thus, they may be less inclined to participate in such research exercises. The daily priorities of “keeping the lights on” might simply be considered more pressing.
- There are high rates of attrition among local African digital platforms.¹³ This means that platforms that might have been active a mere six months ago are no longer active, despite their websites still being online. It is likely that many invitations to participate were sent to defunct organizations (without the researchers’ knowledge).
- For all platforms—regardless of locality or age—the conversation around inclusive work practices for digital platforms is relatively new—even more so for conversations around **gender**-inclusive business practices. To the best of our knowledge, there aren’t any existing frameworks about gender-inclusive practices for digital platforms. The Fairwork Principles (a relatively well-known set of principles around inclusive practices) do not include a gender angle. Similarly, while the World Economic Forum (WEF) Charter of Principles for Good Platform Work explicitly mentions diversity and inclusion (including on the basis of gender) as a key principle, it doesn’t outline practical operational principles through which to ensure such diversity and inclusion.¹⁴ This might explain that this is a topic that is simply less front-of-mind for digital platforms currently, and more advocacy is required.
- Finally, while not explicitly indicated by any would-be respondents, digital platforms, especially resource-strapped local businesses, might be experiencing research fatigue. In recent years digital platforms have received ample attention from international development and research communities, and as such may have received many requests for data in recent years that they are less inclined to respond to.

12 Cenfri, “Emerging Trends from Africa’s Digital Platforms.”

13 Cenfri, *Africa’s Digital Platforms: Overview of Emerging Trends in the Market*.

14 World Economic Forum, *The Charter of Principles for Good Platform Work*.

2 Towards gender-forward business practices for digital platforms

This exploration of a framework for gender-forward business practices for digital platforms begins with the following definition of a gender-forward business:

"A gender-forward business intentionally seeks to address gender inequalities by:

- Providing goods and services that close gender gaps or meet the needs of women or girls*
- Supporting gender diversity through internal policies and practices in the workforce*
- Strengthening inclusion and diversity across the value chain"¹⁵*

Gender-forward practices are the actions that businesses undertake to support inclusion and diversity across their customers, workforce, and value chains—with the addition of platform workers or providers, for digital platforms. Such practices not only contribute to greater inclusion and diversity, and thus the empowerment of individuals, but, importantly, stand to positively impact businesses' bottom line.¹⁶

Figure 2 provides examples and potential business benefits of each example gender-forward business practice.

▼ Figure 2: Examples of gender-forward business practices for digital platforms with expected business benefits

Gender-forward business practice for digital platforms	Expected benefit(s)
Leadership	Deliberately recruiting more women into positions of leadership—either in (senior) management or on the board of directors.
Workforce	De-biasing recruitment processes and/or deliberately recruiting more women into technical or design roles.
Customers	Designing and implementing gender-responsive safety features, such as access to gender-matched ride-hailing or proactive safety response policies.
Workers or providers	Creating gender-responsive training and business management features, responding to particular challenges and needs expressed by women providers (such as e-commerce sellers).

15 Value for Women, *How to Invest with a Gender Lens*.

16 Value for Women, *A Business-First Approach to Gender Inclusion*; IFC, *Women and E-commerce in Africa*.

17 Montilla, "Top Three Reasons We Need More Women in Tech."

18 Montilla, "Top Three Reasons We Need More Women in Tech"; IFC, "DiDi Chuxing's Inclusive Workplace Programs"; IFC, "Mercado Libre's Inclusive Policies Fuel Women's Intrapreneurship and Entrepreneurship in Latin America."

19 IFC, *Driving toward Equality: Women, Ride-hailing, and the Sharing Economy*; IFC, "Grab's Safer Everyday Tech Roadmap."

20 IFC, *Women and E-commerce in Africa*.

3 Overall assessment results

This section outlines the most important themes in the responses among the seven respondents to the pilot assessment. It outlines overall assessment findings and subsequently dives deeper into detail about themes regarding practices facing platform employees, platform customers, platform workers, and finally platform data in general.

Overall, the assessment results showed:

- Respondents generally indicate an understanding of the importance of gender equality overall and articulate, in principle, a commitment to contributing to greater gender equality. However, *these ambitions are generally not backed up with practical policies, practices, or strategies.*
 - Respondents do not back up stated commitments to inclusive HR values with formal policies.
 - Respondents lack a gendered understanding of their business.
- Respondents are *slightly more likely to consider gendered differences in their customers than in their workers or providers* (see Figures 7 and 8).
- A missed opportunity presents itself in the form of data—both about customers and workers or providers.
- When respondents did consider gendered differences in various business areas, they reported seeing positive business impacts as a result.

This section discusses the results of the piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms per business area. All findings are derived from the self-reported data and open-ended answers submitted by the digital platform respondents (anonymized in this report), unless explicitly indicated otherwise. Each section opens with a brief introduction to set the scene and outline the relevance of gender-inclusive practices in this area, and that information is based on literature.

3.1 Respondents

Representatives from seven digital platforms completed the Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms. Figure 3 provides a brief overview of the type of platforms and their years in business.

▼ *Figure 3: Outline of self-assessment respondents based on self-assessment data*

	Gender of respondent	Woman (co-) founder?	Woman in C-Suite?	HQ country	Year of launch	Business size²¹	Business stage²²
Online tickets	Woman	Yes	Yes	Nigeria	2012	Micro	Venture
E-commerce	Man	No	No	Nigeria	2016	Small	Venture
Freelance marketplace	Woman	Yes	Yes	Nigeria	2018	Small	Venture
Freelance marketplace	Man	No	Yes	Nigeria	2019	Small	Venture
Logistics	Man	No	No	Turkey ²³	2019	Medium	Growth
Ride-hailing ²⁴	Man	No	Yes	Kenya	2019	Small	Venture
Delivery	Man	No	Yes	Nigeria	2019	Small	Growth

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

²¹ This looks at employees only, not (active) customers or platform workers/providers. Micro = 1 to 9 employees. Small = 10 to 49 employees. Medium = 50 to 250 employees.

²² Venture = Operations are established, business may or may not be making revenue, but no positive EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization). Growth = positive EBITDA and growing.

²³ This platform is only operational in Nigeria, but is registered in Turkey.

²⁴ Localized in one city only.

3.2 Overall gender inclusion: Commitments to gender equality as a value are seldomly backed up with formal policies, investments, or public statements.

This section considers platforms' overall commitments to and performance on gender inclusion within their business. While such commitments don't necessarily and automatically translate into gender-forward *practices*,²⁵ they are a first step toward identifying the presence of *intentionality*, a key prerequisite for gender-forward business practices. Moreover, the section outlines how many platforms are considered aligned with the 2X Challenge and how many are women-led.²⁶ The 2X Challenge Criteria are globally recognized by gender lens investors (GLI) as a minimum standard for gender-inclusive businesses.

▼ Figure 4: Overall gender inclusion of respondents

2X Aligned: ²⁷	Women-led: ²⁸	Average gender inclusion score: ²⁹
5 out of 7 respondents	2 out of 7 respondents	31%

▼ Figure 5: Examples of respondents' organizational commitment to gender equality or women's empowerment

Number of respondents who indicate they have undertaken any of the following actions (N=7)	
Made gender equality or women's empowerment an explicit part of the business's values	5
Made gender equality or women's empowerment part of the business's top priorities	4
Conducted gender-related or bias trainings for staff	2
Allocated budget to pursuing gender equality or women's empowerment	2
Released a public statement about the business's commitment to gender equality or women's empowerment	2

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

25 UN Women, *The Digital Revolution*.

26 The 2X Challenge is a global initiative to mobilize more capital towards investments contributing to gender equality. Originally established by the DFIs of the G7 countries in 2018, with a target of US\$3 billion, the initiative currently includes both public and private investors globally, and has overshoot its target almost threefold. A renewed commitment sees the 2X target at a total of US\$15 billion committed to gender lens investments by the end of 2022. Members of the 2X Challenge use the so-called 2X Challenge Criteria to determine whether an investment "counts" as a gender lens investment, and these criteria have thus become widely known as a global set of minimum standards. Note that many investors prefer to use more stringent requirements and criteria; the 2X Criteria should really be considered a starting point for identifying potential investees for gender lens investments.

27 2X Challenge, "Criteria."

28 A business is considered women-led when it meets one of the following criteria: woman CEO, over 51% ownership in the hands of women, over 30% of senior management are women, or over 30% of board members are women.

29 The average gender inclusion is an average of all respondents' weighted total scores. These are a combination of all possible practices across all business areas covered in the self-assessment.

"Women make up over 70% of informal workers and we are heavily invested in improving the work experience and earning capacity of informal workers in Nigeria."

Freelance Platform

"Because they [women] are not well compensated by [society] and they offer a lot."

Delivery Platform

Most respondents indicated an explicit commitment to gender inclusion or women's empowerment as part of their values. As questions become more practical, however, application reduces. For example, for most respondents, this commitment to gender equality is not supported by budget allocation or a public statement.

When asked to reflect on the potential for their platforms to contribute to women's economic empowerment, respondents refer mostly to the ways they facilitate the running of small businesses in general. Examples include the flexibility of digital work, reach into distant markets, and various safety features. This is not a particularly gendered reflection, as this applies to both women and men.

About half of respondents also reflect that they intend for their platform to contribute more greatly to gender equality, but that they feel limited by the number of women in their sector or by the perceived willingness of women for the kind of work on offer.

"It's [the] trucking business, where involved [are] mostly men." [sic]

Logistics Platform

"I am willing, the women's attitude is negative to my offer."

Ride-hailing Platform

3.3 Themes about platform employees: Gender diversity decreases for more senior positions.

Women tend to be underrepresented in the workforce, particularly in technology-based sectors, and especially in more senior and/or technical positions. UNESCO studies show that women make up only 30% of tech professionals in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁰ The low representation of women in the tech sector is caused by multiple factors, including so-called “affinity bias” from hiring managers, pay inequality, issues related to workplace culture, and gender gaps in STEM degrees.

This underrepresentation of women can cause companies to miss out on the numerous benefits of having more women on board, including more innovation and creative problem-solving, increases in client centricity and thus client satisfaction, improved financial performance, and a more inclusive and welcoming workplace. Moreover, applying a gender lens to workforce diversity is expected to reduce recruitment costs and improve employee retention. According to a study in the US by the Kapor Center and Harris Poll, workplace culture drives turnover and significantly affects the retention of underrepresented groups in the tech industry, costing the industry more than US\$16 billion annually.³¹ **Ultimately, earning a reputation as a more gender-diverse employer can prove to be a key competitive edge in attracting talented staff.**

▼ *Figure 6: Representation of women across different levels of seniority (average for all respondents)*

Board of Directors

29%

C-Suite

31%

Middle management

48%

Below middle management

48%

■ Women ■ Men

Note: “C-Suite” refers to executive-level senior management of a company, commonly those titles that start with “Chief,” for example, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), or Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Please note that this figure represents average scores among all respondents. With this small sample size, individual respondents’ responses skew the average significantly, and thus show substantial variance.

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

30 UNDP, “Creating a Level Playing Field for Women in Technology in Africa.”

31 Kapor Center, *The 2017 Tech Leavers Study*.

▼ Figure 7: Representation of women across different employee groups (average for all respondents)



Note: This figure represents average scores among all respondents. With this small sample size, individual respondents' responses skew the average significantly, and thus show substantial variance.

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

On average, across all employee types, 41% of respondents' employees are women (one respondent employs 76% women). Considering the *total number of employees from all respondents*, women represent 26%. Respondents are therefore roughly on par with the industry average.

Notably, and in line with trends from other industries and company types, representation of women decreases for more senior positions.

▼ Figure 8: Commitment and practical implementation of various HR policies (all respondents)

Number of respondents that indicate the state of their various HR policies (N=7)	Committed, but no formal policy	Formal policy	Formal policy with enforcement mechanism
General support to employees as parents and caregivers	5	1	1
Non-discrimination and equal employment opportunities	4	1	1
Anti-harassment, violence, and sexual exploitation	3	1	2
Wage equity and regular salary reviews	3	2	1
Paid maternity leave beyond national regulatory requirements	2	2	2
Flexible work options	2	2	2
Paid paternity leave beyond national regulatory requirements	2	1	1
Accommodations for nursing mothers	1	1	1

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

▼ Figure 9: Workplace practices that are in place (all respondents)³²

Number of respondents that indicate they have undertaken any of the following actions (N=7)	
Consistent process to review job applicants	6
Proactive steps to increase women applicants	4
Ensure diverse hiring committee	4
Utilize clear and consistent promotion criteria	3
Conduct regular salary reviews and take action to address any discrepancies found	2
Proactive support for retention and promotion of women	1
Train all HR staff and managers on gender equality	1

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

Human resource policies are the formal rules and guidelines that businesses put in place to hire, train, assess, and reward the members of their workforce. These policies, when organized and disseminated in an easily accessible form, can serve to preempt many misunderstandings between employees and employers about their rights and obligations in the workplace.³³ HR practices, on the other hand, are the steps and actions taken to achieve a particular result in accordance with those policies.³⁴

Taking a holistic approach to incorporating a gender lens throughout all aspects of the employee life cycle will support all employees, regardless of gender, to thrive and succeed in their roles. Additionally, adopting gender-inclusive HR policies and practices has the potential to make the business a more attractive employer, and may result in strengthened and streamlined business operations, with increased employee retention and satisfaction.³⁵

Implementing gender-inclusive HR practices is also an important way to demonstrate commitment to standards, such as the 2X Challenge³⁶ and Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs).³⁷

While all respondents indicate that they provide general support to employees as parents, and most indicate implementation of other inclusive policies, these are not necessarily supported with formal policies or enforcement mechanisms. In fact, questions concerning any existing formal enforcement mechanisms the HR policies considered were answered

32 Whereas HR policies are officially codified policies, workplace practices might be unwritten organizational or cultural norms (though many companies do in some way codify these).

33 Inc, "Human Resources Policies."

34 *Houston Chronicle*, "What Is the Difference between HR Activities vs HR Practices?"

35 McKinsey & Company, *Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters*.

36 Refer to www.2xchallenge.org.

37 Refer to www.weps.org.

affirmatively by only one or two respondents (both freelance platforms). The two types of HR policies with the most formal support (two respondents have formal policies in place, and two have both a formal policy and an enforcement mechanism) are *flexible work options* and *paid maternity leave* beyond the nationally required minimum. Interestingly, the two respondents with any enforcement mechanisms in place show the highest representation numbers of women internally. In fact, the respondent with a formal enforcement mechanism in place for all HR policies under consideration is a women-led business and has the highest representation numbers of women across the board (including different employee types and different levels of management and leadership). The other respondent with slightly fewer enforcement mechanisms in place, while not a women-led business, has a C-Suite that consists of 20% women and is a close second with regard to representation in other categories.

This aligns with the overall trend, where respondents may indicate awareness or consideration for gender-forward practices, but don't support this with formal means of implementation.

3.4 Themes for platform customers: Digital platforms are more likely to consider gendered differences among customers than workers.

When it comes to platforms' customers, there are various actions a platform can undertake to ensure gender inclusion. At a basic level, it comes down to ensuring that women customers' needs are considered, investigated, and addressed through the various offerings and engagements of the company.

For digital platforms specifically, there is an additional layer of digital protections that needs to be considered. With digital divides in place, the likelihood of women requiring additional training or skills in safe and confident use of tech solutions is higher than for men.³⁸ This makes it important to provide adequate training and information about existing security features. Moreover, practical support features, such as emergency buttons and enforcement mechanisms against online harassment, tend to disproportionately benefit women users. Finally, with digital platform engagement increasingly taking place automatically through AI, it is key to be aware of the risks of algorithmic bias and to take action when discrepancies are identified. The likelihood of algorithmic bias against women and other disadvantaged groups is increased by two trends: a lack of women working in AI and a lack of sex-disaggregated data.³⁹

³⁸ Swindells, "The Digital Gender Gap Won't Be Closed until the Internet Is Safer for Women"; UN Women, *The Digital Revolution*.

³⁹ CBR Staff, "AI Is Failing Women"; D'Ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*.

Benefits of such strategies include increased sales, greater market reach, improved brand recognition and customer loyalty, and increased profit margins overall. For individual women customers, gender-forward business practices result in access to more products that are suited to their needs and contexts and which are accessible in a meaningful way, through channels that are frequently and comfortably used.

▼ *Figure 10: Respondents' average gender inclusion score per business area, targeting customers*

Market research and product design

33%

Marketing

43%

Sales

31%

Customer finance

21%

Customer service

62%

Sex-disaggregated data on customers

21%

■ Current practices ■ Gap

Note: This figure represents average scores among all respondents. With this small sample size, individual respondents' responses skew the average significantly, and thus show substantial variance.

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

▼ *Figure 11: Respondents' awareness of and response to possible algorithmic bias*

Number of respondents that indicate they have completed any of the following actions (N=7)

Aware of the possibility of algorithmic bias	5
Plan to do an algorithm audit in future	2
Ever done an algorithm audit	1
Changed any practices as a result of algorithm audit	1

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

▼ Figure 12: Respondents' digital safety mechanisms, all respondents

Number of respondents that indicate they have in place any of the following safety mechanisms (N=7)	
Digital safety (such as communications around the risks of sharing personal information, banking details, or passwords)	6
Physical safety (such as emergency buttons or limits on sharing live locations)	4
Online bullying or harassment	4
Sexual harassment (both online and offline)	3

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

Among the seven respondents, on average, customer service was the business area with the most pervasive engagement with women's needs, whereas more fundamental areas like market research and product design are lagging. It is particularly interesting that there is such a dearth of sex-disaggregated data access and use among the respondents, given that, as digitally driven businesses, access to and use of data is their theoretical bread and butter (see section 3.6).

3.5 Themes for platform workers/providers: Opportunities to increase women workers' earnings remain underexplored.

Digital platforms provide a unique opportunity to expand earning potential among many individuals, especially women. While a platform's model may remove certain barriers for women workers or providers (such as greater flexibility to work from home and/or combine earning a livelihood with care responsibilities), there still remain gendered experiences of platform work, and accompanying challenges and barriers—as also highlighted in the other publications of this project series. When it comes to their workers or providers—those individuals earning a livelihood through the platform—the businesses stand to benefit from: 1) attracting sufficient numbers of women, 2) removing barriers to women's earning potential, and 3) supporting women workers in practical matters, such as issues related to safety.

"Our unique service-as-a-product e-commerce model creates a level playing field for people, especially women, to pursue their career aspirations with the opportunity of working from home. The flexible work time and digital delivery of service enables this community to work at their own pace, while still caring for children and elderly family members." [sic]

Freelance Platform

"Helping women to connect and make sales is at the core of what we do."

E-commerce Platform

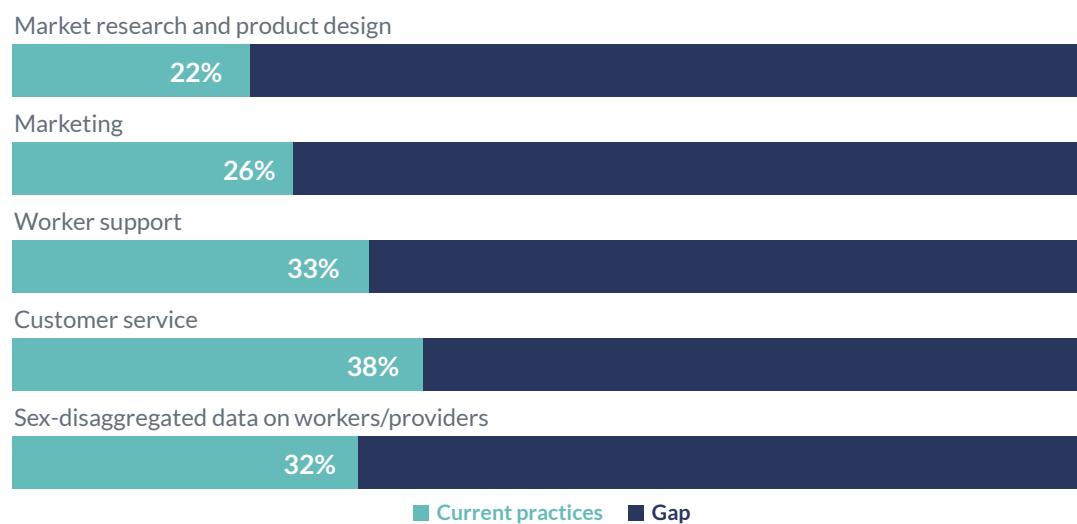
By attracting more women workers and ensuring that barriers to their success are mitigated, digital platforms stand to benefit their bottom line. For example, according to the IFC, the African e-commerce sector would increase by US\$15 billion by 2030 if women's online sales reached parity with men's.⁴⁰ There is also anecdotal evidence that women workers might in some instances operate more efficiently, improving margins for the platforms, or might exhibit greater platform loyalty—this is supported by respondent comments.

"We have female riders which have a much higher retention rate than the male [sic] and are treated better by the customers."

Ride-hailing Platform

Two ways in which e-commerce platforms could strive for greater gender equality among their workers are tailored marketing of paid advertising services (which greatly increase sellers' potential, but which women sellers are less likely to use) and access to more integrated business management tools (which women sellers indicate finding more impactful than their male counterparts).⁴¹

▼ *Figure 13: Respondents' average gender inclusion score per business area, targeting workers or providers*



Note: This figure represents average scores among all respondents. With this small sample size, individual respondents' responses skew the average significantly, and thus show substantial variance.

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

Overall, respondents were slightly less likely to apply a gender lens to their activities vis-à-vis workers than they were vis-à-vis customers.

40 IFC, *Women and E-commerce in Africa*.

41 IFC, *Women and E-commerce in Africa*.

With regard to specific support provided to platform workers or providers, we surveyed platforms on a list of offerings that are known to benefit women workers disproportionately.⁴² While many respondents offered these services, the majority do not specifically consider the needs of women workers in setting them up, which is a missed opportunity.

"We've provided a certain category of women with access to smart devices and data and we've seen them earn ×2 of their usual monthly earnings month on month."

Freelance Platform

▼ Figure 14: Types of support provided to platform workers/providers and gender lens applied to these (all respondents)

Number of respondents that indicate they provide the following types of support to platform workers/providers (N=7)	Offered	Offered with consideration for gender differences
Training on how to use the platform	7	2
Digital literacy training	4	2
Training on skills used for the livelihoods earned on the platform (for example, digital marketing for e-commerce sellers)	4	2
Access to a wider range of training beyond the skills immediately required for the livelihoods earned on the platform	4	1
Value-added financial services	4	2
Inputs necessary for the livelihoods earned on the platform (for example, fuel discounts for ride-hailing drivers)	2	1
Assets necessary for the livelihoods earned on the platform (for example, access to vehicles)	4	1
Access to support networks within the platform ecosystem	2	0

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

42 This list was developed based on a combination of desktop research—including the IFC's Digital2Equal work—and existing Value for Women technical assistance projects to digital platforms in various geographies.

3.6 Themes for platform data: Sex-disaggregated is an under-utilized, yet valuable, asset for digital platforms.

A missed opportunity presents itself in the form of data—both about customers and workers or providers. Such data on platform users (ratings, earnings, number of jobs/trips/sales, complaints, product preferences, frequency and timing of logging in, etc.) is critical for digital platforms to run their business and can be hugely beneficial in platforms improving their offerings and efficiencies overall.⁴³ Respondents to this assessment, however, by and large indicated limited availability of sex-disaggregated data on customers and workers; moreover, where this data was available, respondents did not report widespread use of such data.

▼ *Figure 15: Platforms' data collection and use (all respondents)*

Number of respondents that indicate they track the following data (N=7)	Sex-disaggregated	
Workforce composition	3	
Customer composition	2	
End user composition	1	
Data on workers/providers (N=7)	Not sex-disaggregated	Sex-disaggregated
Jobs worked (value)	5	2
Earnings	4	2
Number of registered workers/providers	4	2
Jobs worked (type)	3	3
Jobs worked (volume)	4	2
Ratings received	3	3
Complaints received	4	2
Number of active workers/providers	3	2
Complaints made	3	2
Time spent working	4	1
Time spent on unpaid work	2	2

Source: Self-reported data responses to piloted Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms.

4 Sector recommendations

Based on the initial exploration above, this section outlines initial recommendations for two sets of stakeholders in the sector: digital platforms themselves and sector stakeholders that work with, support, or influence digital platforms (for example, through funding grants or creating standards).

4.1 Gender-forward business practices: Low-hanging fruit

Based on the assessment responses, desktop research, and gendered experiences of platform workers (as highlighted in the demand-side component of this project), this section offers a set of recommendations that are “low-hanging fruit,” easily implemented gender-forward business practices for digital platforms.

These are considered low-hanging fruit because they represent limited change from current business practices, can be achieved with relatively limited resources (and are thus suitable to early-stage companies⁴⁴), and are expected to have an impact on some of the most commonly raised issues for women platform workers.

Strategy 1 Improve sex-disaggregated data collection and use.

As highlighted above, digital platforms depend on data to run effectively and efficiently, and to grow.⁴⁵ Moreover, digital platforms themselves generate large amounts of data on their users (both customers and workers). However, this exploration into the practices of digital platforms suggests that the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data is not as common as it should be. Ensuring that this data is simply collected and used in a sex-disaggregated manner and with appropriate regard for privacy, therefore, shouldn’t remove platforms too far from their current operations. The collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data is the starting point for most approaches to increasing gender inclusion in any business. Such sex-disaggregated data collection and use will enable platforms to:

- Assess current reach among women and men.
- Identify gendered differences in platform use, including in purchasing preferences, jobs completed, ratings received, total earnings, etc.⁴⁶
- Validate gender-forward strategies by highlighting the business value of women as platform customers or workers.
- Take action in the case of gendered discrepancies and determine appropriate strategies for doing so. Specifically, develop sex-disaggregated targets and KPIs for increasing women in leadership, workforce, or users.

44 Mobile for Development, “Starting Out Smart: Gender-Smart Strategies for Start-up Success.”

45 Rangaswamy et al., “The Role of Marketing in Digital Business Platforms.”

46 IFC, “Facebook’s Use of Sex-disaggregated to Design Targeted Programs for Women.”

Strategy 2 Draft and publish a gender commitment statement.

While such a statement in and of itself will not directly lead to more gender-inclusive practices, it can be a powerful tool for a business to clearly articulate to external stakeholders (including prospective users) their intention to contribute to gender equality through their business activities. Businesses that have published such gender commitment statements have benefited from increased brand recognition and greater market reach, as well as greater reach among potential new recruits, among others.⁴⁷ For example, research shows that women are close to 80% more likely to try products and services, as well as increase their brand loyalty, when they are aware that companies are committed to gender equality.⁴⁸ Globally, a study by Unilever found that one-third of customers prefer buying from large brands that they believe are doing social or environmental good.⁴⁹

The process of developing such a statement can also be valuable, as it requires businesses to critically engage with important questions, such as 1) what gender inclusion means for them, 2) why gender inclusion is important for the business, and 3) how, specifically, the business will incorporate this into daily practices. Such explicit articulations of gender inclusion targets and commitments can also contribute to momentum: reaching official targets is more recognizable as an achievement than when informal progress.⁵⁰ Given that most respondents articulated an implicit commitment to gender equality, but lacked practical strategies and policies, the process of developing such a statement is expected to assist with making this implicit commitment more practical, while not being too great a stretch from current business practices.

In developing such a statement, it is critical that businesses align their goals with clear targets that are linked with key performance indicators (KPIs) and staff mandates. Depending on context, this is something to which a board can hold management accountable, or senior management may hold individual department heads accountable. Ultimately, it is important to avoid a situation where a commitment statement becomes another piece of paper that is read but not acted upon.

Strategy 3 Ensure all strategy and market research is done in a sex-disaggregated manner.

Women as a customer segment can find themselves in businesses' blind spots. For example, the Financial Alliance for Women found that close to two-thirds of fintechs do not conduct market research on women customers,⁵¹ leading them to underestimate and insufficiently understand women as a customer and worker segment.⁵² Research has shown that customer centricity can greatly contribute to businesses' outperforming their peers.⁵³

47 Eswaran, "The Business Case for Diversity in the Workplace Is Now Overwhelming."

48 Vazquez and Sherman, *Buying for Impact: How to Buy from Women and Change Our World*.

49 Unilever, "Report Shows a Third of Consumers Prefer Sustainable Brands."

50 UN Global Compact, "4 Simple Things all Companies Can Do to Promote Diversity and Inclusion."

51 Financial Alliance for Women, *How Fintechs Can Profit from the Multi-trillion-dollar Female Economy*.

52 Value for Women, *A Business-first Approach to Gender Inclusion*.

53 CGAP, "Why Go Customer-centric?"

A key part of customer centricity is to divide users into meaningful segments—including by gender! With African women making the overwhelming majority of household purchasing decisions,⁵⁴ women being more likely to remain digital customers after switching to online shopping,⁵⁵ and the value of the e-commerce industry expected to increase significantly with the onboarding of more women providers,⁵⁶ **digital platforms can't afford not to focus on women in their market research.**

Given that (segmented) market research is a key step for any business designing and validating a meaningful product and achieving suitable product-market fit, ensuring this is done in a sex-disaggregated manner would be a small (yet crucial) change to current operations. Practical suggestions to this effect include:

- Ensure data is collected on both women and men.
- Where focus group discussions are organized, include both women and men.
- Whenever data or insights are reported on, ensure that this is done in a sex-disaggregated way—explicitly showing the data for women versus men.
- Ensure both women and men are involved in teams conducting market research and designing products.

Strategy 4 Consider gendered differences when providing training or support to platform workers or providers.

Building on gendered market research and the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated user data, platforms will be in a good position to apply a gender lens to worker or provider training and support. This training or support entails the resources made available to platform workers/providers to increase their chances of successful onboarding and earning on the platform, such as onboarding tools and training, access to business management tools for e-commerce, value-added financial services, or other types of training. Recognizing the overall business value of supporting platform workers to increase their chances of success, many platforms offer a variety of such resources to their users—which is echoed by the responses to the pilot assessment.

As highlighted in the demand-side component of this study, as well as other research, **women workers often experience different challenges related to their livelihoods on online platforms and therefore prefer different types of support than their men counterparts.** For example, the IFC found that women sellers on Jumia showed greater appreciation and uptake of business management tools than their men counterparts, which can have greater impact on their e-commerce business success.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ipsos, *African Women*.

⁵⁵ IFC, *Women and E-commerce in Africa*.

⁵⁶ IFC, *Women and E-commerce in Africa*.

⁵⁷ IFC, *Women and E-commerce in Africa*.

Some specific examples of such gendered platform worker support include:

- **Lynk, a digital platform for artisans in Kenya, realized women “Pros” make up close to 40% of digital workers, conducting close to 50% of the platform assignments but earning only 16% of all platform earnings.** This earnings gap was largely attributable to differences in the sectors in which women are active versus those in which men are active. Through Fundiworks, a small business incubation platform for furniture manufacturers, Lynk provided incubatees (targeting one-third women participants) with access to shared workshops, marketing and sales services, and material inputs—among others. These services reduced the barriers to entry formed by high, fixed overhead costs for the sector. All participating Pros in furniture manufacturing were able to increase their income as a result.⁵⁸
- **Airbnb, having surveyed women hosts in India, realized they could provide more support to them beyond the onboarding stage, such as tailored training, especially for hosts with limited digital literacy, challenges with internet access, and potential challenges with English.** By arranging multi-day trainings in a combination of local languages, focusing on low-connectivity contexts, and involving hosts’ families, Airbnb was able to reach many women and increase their income. For example, participants indicated anecdotally that their monthly income from Airbnb now exceeds their annual income from farming.⁵⁹
- **Elo7, “Brazil’s answer to Etsy,” conducted a survey of its women sellers and realized two important things: 1) the majority of women selling on Elo7 signed up after they had become mothers, citing flexibility as a key reason; and 2) over half of women on Elo7 indicated that marketing and publicity were their biggest challenges.** In response, Elo7 developed a series of workshops, webinars, and other training materials around such practical challenges and explicitly targeted these at women (for example, around International Women’s Day). By directly tackling practical hindrances to commercial success, and explicitly targeting women for these trainings, Elo7 can contribute meaningfully to their business success and continues to survey its women sellers periodically to track their performance.⁶⁰

Short of suggesting a gendered overhaul of worker support offered, platforms might consider a gendered look at the support they already offer. A first step could be to collect user feedback on the resources available *and sex-disaggregate these findings*. This will provide a first step in identifying any gaps or opportunities for improvement. Such gendered worker support is expected to increase the overall success of women platform workers/providers, thus contributing to increases in overall platform revenues.⁶¹

58 IFC, “Lynk Addresses Inclusion in the Formal Sector.”

59 IFC, “Airbnb’s Home-sharing Trainings.”

60 IFC, “Elo7 Grows its E-commerce Platform by Helping Women Become Digital Entrepreneurs.”

61 IFC, “Jumia’s Women and Youth Empowerment Program.”

4.2 Recommendations for ecosystem stakeholders

While the strategies described above are directed at digital platform businesses themselves, there are numerous other stakeholders of influence in the industry. These stakeholders cannot implement gender-forward business practices directly, but may strive to influence and/or support digital platforms to do so. The following recommendations are directed toward stakeholders interested in supporting the gender inclusion of digital platforms.

- **Increase advocacy around the importance and business benefits of gender-forward business practices for digital platforms.** This may include publishing examples and case studies of gender-forward business strategies or releasing data about gender gaps and missed opportunities for digital platforms.
- **Encourage businesses to complete a gender self-assessment as a starting point to identify gaps and areas for improvement.** This can be either a formal assessment (such as the Gender Lens Survey for Digital Platforms piloted in this study) or an informal self-assessment where platforms take a critical look at their operations. The aim is to encourage businesses to highlight where they have and have not taken gendered differences into account, and to identify strategies that can be easily implemented moving forward.
- **Earmark funding for gender-forward pilots within digital platforms,** including technical assistance, case studies, or eligible investments.
- **Encourage the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data by digital platforms.** Depending on the type of stakeholder, this might either be a requirement that is put in place (for example, by investors of their investees), or by providing technical support. One could consider making available resources to support the upgrade of available data systems and processes, or directly contributing to studies that collect sex-disaggregated data from digital platform users (such as surveys).

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