



Gender-forward practises in agri-business **CASE STUDY 1**

December 2021

SEX-DISAGGREGATED DATA

START HERE FOR GENDER-FORWARD BUSINESS STRATEGIES

This thematic case study forms part of a series. Over the course of 11 months in 2020-21, Value for Women engaged a number of Musika's private sector clients - businesses involved in the agricultural sector - with gender lens technical assistance. Musika is a Zambian non-profit company that works to stimulate private sector investment in smallholder agriculture markets. This case study series describes the strategies, impacts, and learnings that resulted from the technical assistance, with the purpose of facilitating greater ecosystem replication. We share a number of cost-effective entry points that can yield significant impact.

This particular case study focuses on **using sex-disaggregated data for high impact gender-forward business strategies.**

1. The challenge

Many businesses want to become more gender forward, but are flying blind. They seek to serve more women customers as a way to expand their market reach or they seek to provide more equal opportunities as a way to improve workforce engagement. Yet without sex-disaggregated data, it is impossible to understand women's and men's needs and preferences.

All participating agribusinesses suffered from this challenge. Data challenges existed both internally (not having sex-disaggregated HR data on performance, retention, and engagement levels) as well as externally (not having sex-disaggregated data on customer numbers, needs, and challenges). **This gave rise to a number of business performance challenges for the Zambian agribusinesses:**

"We can't do anything without basic biodata"

"From the initial self-assessment, we were not aware of gender inclusion but we got some insights— that was very important to us"

- **Opportunities were missed.** Women are estimated to make up to 53% of the agricultural workforce in Zambia¹, yet companies observed that women made up a far smaller portion of their customer base. Failure to intentionally and successfully access this customer base significantly limits business growth and market share.
- **Women were confined as less valuable customers than men.** One agribusiness that sells agricultural equipment saw that women customers tended to access less valuable equipment, keeping them trapped in a cycle of slower increase in agricultural productivity, meaning they continued to have fewer resources to invest in the agribusiness's more valuable equipment.
- **Problems were misdiagnosed, causing resources to be wasted on ill-informed initiatives.** One agribusiness focused on livestock health services observed low participation among women farmers, and so looked to target communications to encourage more women farmers to focus on livestock. However it later turned out that women's low participation was *not* due to lack of interest— but rather to *challenges in accessing and engaging* with the existing services. The agribusiness had nearly invested in a campaign that would not have addressed the actual problem.
- **The impact of initiatives was not tracked, making it difficult to maintain buy-in and action.** For example, a solar company had been focused on encouraging women into leadership positions, but had not measured whether the desired attitudinal changes had actually been achieved.

To identify the changes a business needs to make to meet women's and men's needs, sex-disaggregated data is required. Sex-disaggregated employee data is needed to understand women and men employees' satisfaction, performance, and perceptions of opportunity to grow within the business. Sex-disaggregated customer data is needed to understand how many customers are women and men, which products and services each are each using, and what barriers each is experiencing to accessing these.

2. The approach

For each of the agribusinesses, then, collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated data was the first essential step for their gender-forward endeavour. To do this, Value for Women developed data collection tools and guidance for each business. These corresponded to the business's objectives, pressing questions, and time and resources available. See Figure 2 for an overview of the tools, plotted according to the amount of time and resources required for each, and Figure 3 for a brief description of these requirements.

Figure 2: Data collection tools and methods used, according to time and resources required

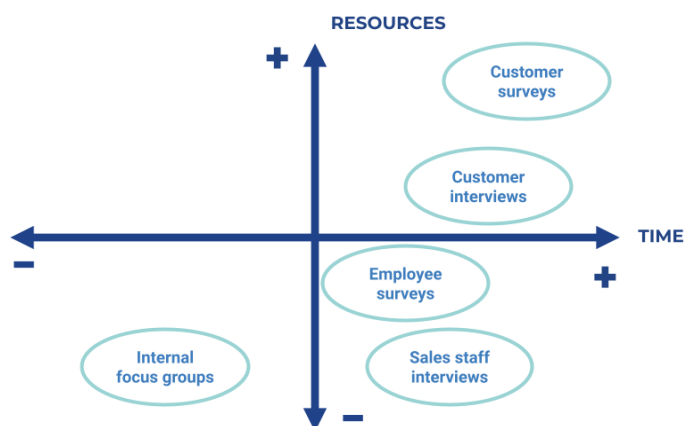


Figure 3: Brief description of time and resources involved in each data collection method

Human resources data: Some time to set up tracking systems, but once set up, it will require minimal time.

Employee surveys: These are a paid service conducted by consultants (like Value for Women). While an enterprise could conduct the survey itself, this might make it difficult to maintain anonymity, which will limit (candid) response rates.

Customer surveys: These require time and telephone, internet, and/or travel costs. If combined with planned field visits, it can be done more efficiently. There are both free and paid-for survey tools available.

Rapid-fire interviews with customers, agents, or staff: These require time and logistics costs (e.g., transport, airtime or internet, printing). You may also need to offer respondents an incentive.



Internal focus groups: Beyond the time of staff, away from their day-to-day activities, these require little other direct costs. If staff are spread across different locations, transport costs may be involved.

3. The solutions

Insights, solutions, and impacts

Each of the participating agribusinesses gained impactful insights for their business. Examples of these and the changes that businesses subsequently implemented and their impact are below.² Sometimes the insights were contrary to expectations; this only reinforces the importance of sex-disaggregating data.

Insights obtained	Solutions / changes implemented	Achieved or expected impact ³
Staff engagement and growth		
Women employees reported feeling they had less access to professional development opportunities/training.	Company-wide surveys and polls for employees to indicate the topics and skills they would like to see added to the training roster .	 Increased training attendance and engagement of women staff.
Women commented more on the need for clearer communication about internal job or promotion opportunities and the criteria for each.	Company-wide announcements about available promotions (and criteria for those). Also, company-wide announcements about successful promotions, to raise awareness.	 Internal applicants more frequently meet the requirements for the role.  Increase in women employees actively working towards the required performance standards for promotions, and actively applying for said promotions.
Sales staff performance		
Women sales staff reported facing significant sales challenges due to limited mobility, as they are less likely to have motorcycle licence.	New incentive scheme giving bicycles to top performing sales agents, allowing them to cover more territory in less time.	 Increased percentage of women in the salesforce; improved sales performance of women agents; increased reach among women customers..
Customer access to products and services leading to increased customer business performance		
Women and men reported farming with different types of livestock (and	Will expand the offering of veterinary services and training to cover	 Increase in women farmers' enrollment in offered training; ultimately, increase in

identified which these are)	livestock commonly owned by women.	women's livestock businesses' performance and by extension their off-take of more valuable services from the agribusiness.
<p>Women reported being hampered in their attendance of farmer group meetings, mostly due to two challenges:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Numerous demands on their time 2) Social norms limiting their freedom to engage in mixed groups (where women and men come together) 	Will establish women-only farmer groups .	 <p>Increase in women's access to and engagement in farmer group meetings; and ultimately, increased performance of women's livestock businesses.</p>
<p>Women expressed a preference for receiving business service information directly via telephone (or WhatsApp), rather than via community leaders or lead farmers— who tend to be men.</p>	<p>Developing a database of farmers' contact information and will seek funding for an expanded offering of online and call-in information services.</p>	 <p>Increase in women's: access to business service information, engagement with farmer group meetings and trainings; direct feedback to the agribusiness. Ultimately, increased performance of women's livestock businesses.</p>

Legend:  Impact achieved

 Impact expected

Tips

Based on the experiences shared in this case study and the challenges that sometimes came alongside them, we offer the following tips:

Train field staff on best practises in gender-inclusive data collection, in addition to technical data collection. Companies reflected on the fact that women might be less able to speak candidly than men during data-collection, for example, and so it is important to have strategies and techniques that enable and encourage women to speak without hesitation.

Involve your field staff and other employees who regularly engage with customers (such as customer service staff). They may have more insights than you realise.

As a rule of thumb, budget for in-person data collection costs. Women farmers may not have access to smartphones, or may not always have their phones available, so in-person data collection will provide you the most comprehensive sample and most complete picture of your women customers' needs. In-person data collection does require more resources for transportation, and is more time-consuming. One agribusiness' inability to allocate this staff time and cover transport costs meant they delayed collecting customer data and subsequently acting on the insights.

Use alternative data collection methods when necessary. Another organisation faced challenges reaching farmers in-person when the staff members assigned to collect data in person contracted COVID-19. Pivoting, they instead collected data

“It opened up our minds and helped us to look at things in a different perspective... We had bundled women with men in one group and expected them to survive however they could. Learning [about the] different needs of women is beneficial to our company.”

from those farmers whom staff could reach by phone or who visited the office and service locations.

Have a third party collect and analyse employee data and feedback. One employer faced challenges because employees feared the employer would see their individual responses and retaliate if the employee criticised the company. Ensuring employees that all information will be kept anonymous will facilitate a suitable response rate.

Put in place systems to regularly continue tracking data. While one-off data exercises are valuable for answering questions and informing new courses of action, it is the continued tracking and monitoring of performance and impact that can really support a business in staying the course and continuously improving its approach.

“Women are not free to speak, especially when they are with their husbands. They also have certain ideas they want to give but haven't been forthcoming due to these limitations”

4. Recommendations to get started

For businesses

Taking the time for a sex-disaggregated data-driven approach aligned with your existing practices will enable you to develop effective strategies targeted at your real pain points. **When deciding on your data collection approach, consider:**

- **What existing data do you have?** Make sure you are already using your existing data to the maximum potential. For example, you may already have customer surveys where you included a question on the respondent's sex, and now you can re-analyse the responses by sex.
- **How much time and resources do you have?** If these are very limited, consider low-resource approaches that, even if not perfect, can give you initial insights on your women customers. Make sure the resources allocated match those required for the logistics to reach your respondents. If not, you may need to adjust your scope or strategy.
- **What is your objective?** Whether you want to broadly understand your women customers or validate a particular product, for example, will help you then define who you need to talk with, how many people, and what questions to ask. Keep in mind that you need not ask every question you can possibly think of; sometimes rapid-fire interviews (of approx 15 min each) are sufficient to answer a specific, targeted question.

For ecosystem actors & business development service providers

When supporting agribusinesses, make financing for sex-disaggregated research available to them. If you already have access to survey tools, make those tools available to your network. Facilitate (or fund) anonymised and regular survey deployment by a third party where possible; this will ensure that respondents' anonymity is respected and respondents are forthcoming and that agribusinesses can keep their sex-disaggregated data up to date.

Background: Gender-forward practises in agribusiness

Value for Women defines gender-forward business practises as ones that:

- 1) Intentionally seek to rectify gender inequalities by providing **products** and services that close gender gaps or meet the needs of women and/or girls;
- 2) Support gender diversity through internal policies and practises in the **workforce**; or
- 3) Strengthen inclusion and diversity across the **value chain**.



Gender-forward agribusiness practises are good for both socioeconomic development and business. Specifically, gender equality (SDG 5) is a prerequisite for sustainable development, and it is mutually reinforcing with increased food security (SDG 2).⁴ Additionally, gender-forward businesses are likely to have higher financial performance than the median and greater capacity for innovation.⁸ They also have expanded market reach by focusing on both women and men.

In Zambia, women are estimated to make up 53% of the agricultural workforce⁵ yet their yield lags behind that of men, as their businesses are more likely to be informal, and using less efficient and low-value activities.⁶ However, research has shown that **women producers would be just as efficient as their men counterparts if they had equal access to productive assets, inputs, and hired labour. Their productivity could increase even further with access to services specifically catering to gendered differences.**⁷

In this light, **Musika**, a Zambian non-profit company that works to stimulate private sector investment in smallholder agricultural markets, partnered with Value for Women to provide gender inclusion technical assistance to four agricultural businesses in the country. Musika aims to reduce poverty in the rural households of Zambia and ensure that both women and men equitably participate in and benefit from the development of the agricultural market; they recognise that women's empowerment is core to this.

Authors: Renée Hunter & Yvonne Krywyj, Value for Women
Image credits: emd710g on Flickr

Endnotes

- 1) FAO (2018). [National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods](#).
- 2) Bear in mind that these insights are, by design, context- and company-specific, and cannot necessarily be generalised to other organisations. While reading these insights can trigger similar understandings for other organisations, and might serve as inspiration, we highly recommend that each organisation interested in similar strategies design and implement their own data collection strategy. The starting point for a data-driven approach should be the absence of preconceived notions and assumptions.
- 3) Where organisations have implemented and measured change, the impact is given - for others, the expected impact is described.
- 4) Care International (2020). [Gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition](#).
- 5) FAO (2018). [National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods](#).
- 6) World Bank (2015). [Linking women with agribusiness in Zambia](#).
- 7) Value for Women (2018). [Gender inclusion for climate-smart agribusiness](#).
- 8) IFC (2016). [The business case for women's employment in agribusiness](#).
- 9) Value for Women's gender self-assessment and report include sections on: Overall gender commitment; HR policies and practices; Marketing and sales; Customer finance; Customer service; Supply and distribution; and Sex-disaggregated data.