



VALUE FOR WOMEN INSIGHTS SERIES

# Gender Smart Nexus Benchmark Report

Enterprises



VOLUME 1, **ISSUE 7**

**Value for Women** is a global pioneer with a mission to promote women's participation and leadership in business, finance, and investment in emerging markets. It does this through building individual leadership, equipping businesses, and driving innovation through data & research. Value for Women is a woman-led company and its diverse team is spread across 5 continents and has expertise in countless sectors. Learn more at [www.v4w.org](http://www.v4w.org).

### About this Value for Women Insights Series

As we celebrate Value for Women's 10th Anniversary this year, we have undertaken a broad research initiative to provide insights on gender, business, and investing in emerging markets over the last decade. This initiative takes stock of gender and business to surface tensions, challenges, and opportunities and offers analysis, tools, and solutions for advancing action toward gender equality. Details on the series, including the methodology, can be found in [Insights Issue 1: Looking Back](#)".



This Insights series was supported by Visa Foundation, as part of its work to support inclusive economies where individuals, businesses, and communities can thrive.



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In this Benchmark, we provide readers with a snapshot of the state of play in emerging markets' gender inclusion. Drawing on data from hundreds of enterprises around the world that are seeking to advance their progress on gender inclusion, the report details what gender-inclusive actions enterprises are taking, where actions are lagging, and how actions taken have been perceived to impact business outcomes.

This Benchmark has been written primarily for investors interested in gender inclusion as a performance strategy for their fund and portfolio. Additionally, enterprises themselves and the broader gender lens investing ecosystem will also benefit from the findings and recommendations herein.

# OUR FIRST GLOBAL BENCHMARK REPORT

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In our 10 years of supporting enterprises, investors, financial institutions, and enterprise support organizations, we at Value for Women have found that often management has a strong desire to adopt gender-inclusive practices and design gender-inclusive solutions but they aren't sure where to start. We saw a pressing need to build easy-to-access tools that equip these organizations to identify potential inclusive practices and take their first steps to adopt them. The result was the Gender Smart Nexus (“Nexus”).

As hundreds of organizations around the world have taken advantage of Nexus, it has also become a powerful receptacle of unique data that helps us understand the state of play in emerging markets’ gender inclusion. This Global Benchmark Report is built on this data.

Our objective with this report is to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on what works in terms of gender-inclusive practices and how these practices can help enterprises achieve their business goals. Specifically, **we sought to understand what gender-inclusive actions enterprises are taking, where actions are lagging, and how actions taken have been perceived to impact business outcomes.**

This report is intended to add to the strong and growing evidence on the business case for including women and a gender focus. As shared in [Insights Issue 2: The Business Case](#), our review of 15 studies over the last two decades (including datasets from developed and emerging market economies) showed strong correlation between gender diversity in business and company performance.<sup>1</sup> **This Global Benchmark Report adds to this wider business case by looking both at a unique subset of companies— companies that are smaller and are already interested in gender inclusion –and at different business areas beyond women in leadership.**





## WHO THIS REPORT IS FOR

**This report has been written for investors interested in gender inclusion as a performance strategy who want to know more about where enterprises can start, what some enterprises are currently doing, and what results they are seeing in their enterprises.** The report also has useful lessons for the enterprises themselves. Additionally, the broader gender lens investing ecosystem –including enterprise support organizations, donors, academics, and others– will benefit from the findings and recommendations in this report.

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## Gender Smart Nexus

**What is it?** The Gender Smart Nexus is an online platform that helps enterprises, investors, financial institutions, and enterprise support organizations evaluate their policies and practices regarding their approach to women’s inclusion. Nexus looks at potential changes within the organization, with regard to the products and services it offers and the commercial or financial relationships it seeks to establish.

**What can it do?** Users have access to a series of assessment tools that simplify their gender evaluation processes. Then, Nexus provides users with ready access to a tailored report with suggested actions they can take to move their organization forward in its gender journey. The ability to re-take self-evaluations enables organizations to assess their progress over time. Additionally, investors and entrepreneur support organizations can measure how enterprises receiving their support are progressing on adopting gender-forward business practices, benchmark organizations against each other, and measure employee satisfaction and organizational culture through a gender lens.

**Is it free?** Because Value for Women is committed to information transparency and access to data to move the field forward, we built Nexus as a free, public good. Most of the functionalities are available to any organization interested in assessing its gender inclusion strengths and weaknesses.

**How to join?** To learn more about the Gender Smart Nexus and how to sign up, follow this link: [www.v4w.org/gender-smart-nexus](http://www.v4w.org/gender-smart-nexus)

## METHODOLOGY

### About the Data

The data housed in Nexus is generated either as part of an organization's independent self-assessment on the platform or as part of direct engagement with VFW (be it through advisory services or our research endeavors) and subsequently captured in Nexus.

Please note that as a result, the data collected is self-reported and reflects the perceptions and knowledge of the respondents at the time of submission. Furthermore, this data represents the state of practice at the moment of measurement, it is not longitudinal data. Finally, given that the organizations in Nexus already have a level of exposure to gender topics, the sample of enterprises is not fully representative of the broader enterprise and investor community in the emerging markets and could have a more positive association with gender inclusion work than that held by the broader community.

While over 900 investors, financial institutions, and entrepreneur support organizations have taken advantage of Nexus to date (of which 631 have been enterprises), the data included in this report draws specifically from the 184 enterprises for which data was submitted between December 2020 and April 2022. As such, this report focuses on gender-inclusive practices specifically in enterprises.

The forthcoming companion report, entitled "Value for Women Insights Series: Gender Smart Nexus Benchmark Report– Investors", looks at investor data from this same period.



### Our Analysis

We have followed a few guiding principles when analyzing the data presented in this report. These are outlined below:

**Validity of responses.** The data has been scrubbed to reflect only the 184 respondents with valid, confirmed submissions. This is important because, by nature of the self-assessment being open to the public, noise is often added to the database (e.g. when there are multiple users from a single organization). The following criteria were used to determine the validity of a response:

- a. Having a confirmed and active account
- b. Having agreed to share their information for benchmarking purposes
- c. Having disclosed the name of their enterprise
- d. Having created a correct profile (for example, that the enterprise created an enterprise account rather than an investor account)
- e. Being the main point of contact, in cases of multiple users from a single organization
- f. The submission being the most recent submission from the user within the selected time period

**Consistency.** The data has not been collected as a single research effort but has been an intentional process of engaging different projects in using the same self-assessment survey. Key questions and question groups have remained unchanged through various iterations of Nexus. Additionally, the questions in Nexus have been aligned with global industry standards, such as the 2X Challenge criteria<sup>2</sup>, and principles, as well as those outlined in the UN Global Compact/UN Women's Women's Empowerment Principles<sup>3</sup> (WEP) tool.

**Building the business case for gender inclusion.** With an eye to building the business case for gender inclusion, Nexus invites respondents to share any perceived business and social impacts from the practices and policies they have implemented.



## Research Limitations

The results on business and social outcomes are encouraging and are an important indication of the direction of travel. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Nexus only presents questions about outcomes to those respondents who have carried out gender-inclusive practices in each business area assessed, which results in smaller sizes. As such, the findings presented in this report need further corroboration, which will come as our database grows and longitudinal data becomes available.

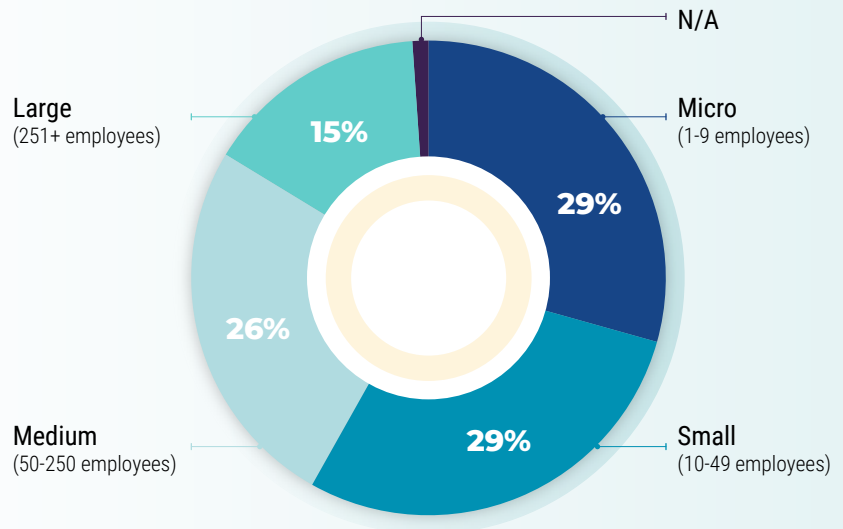
Furthermore, in response to our self-assessment survey questions of whether enterprises had seen positive impacts related to the uptake of gender-forward business practices, across the different practices anywhere from 22% to 51% of respondents were unable to confirm the results of the adoption, depending on the practice in question. Based on our research showing that few enterprises are using sex-disaggregated statistics for reflection and strategic planning purposes, our operating assumption is that the enterprises indicated they didn't know or aren't aware of the results because they failed to track the outcomes of gender actions. Future VfW research efforts will break down this data point to better understand the explanatory factors behind it.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAMPLE

184 verified enterprises that submitted self-assessments between December 2020 and April 2022 through the Nexus platform have been included in this report.

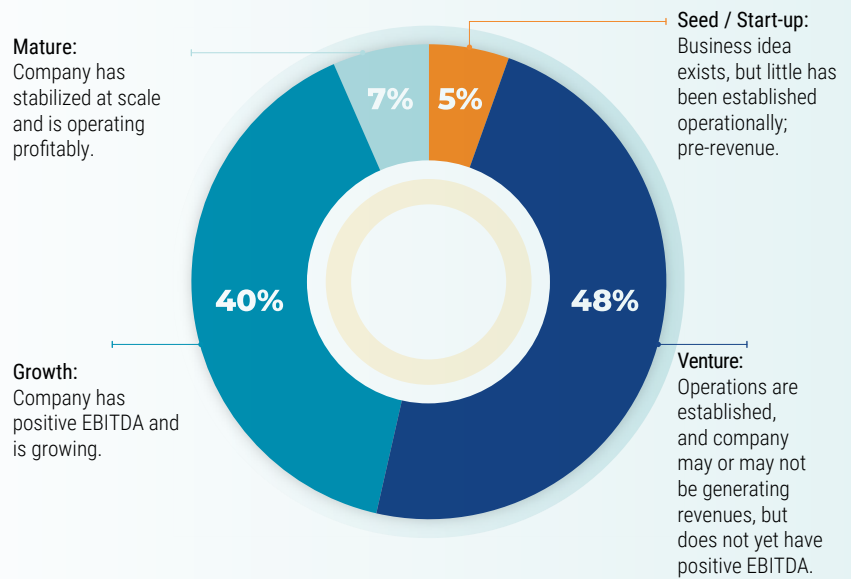
### Size

The Nexus database includes enterprises of all sizes. The majority of enterprises in our sample are micro and small, having less than 50 employees.

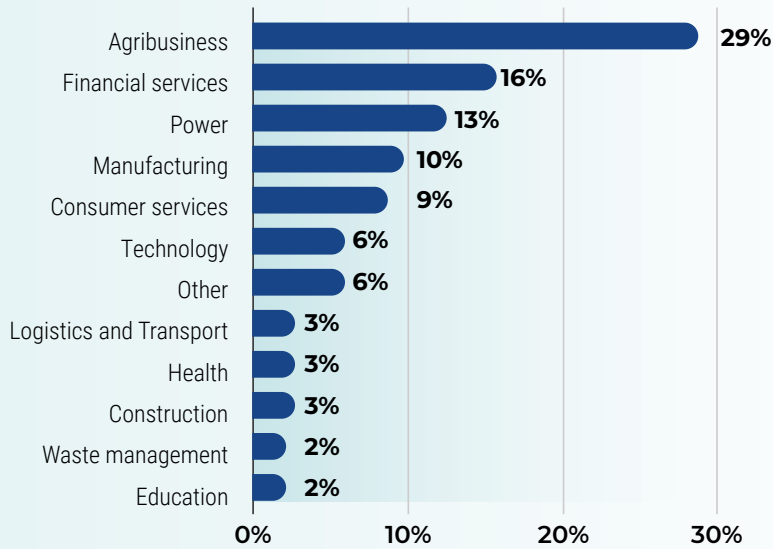


### Stage

Most enterprises in our sample are either at the venture stage, with established operations either pre- or post-revenue, or in the growth stage, with positive EBITDA. The dataset is also weighted towards enterprises that are 10 years old or younger (70%).





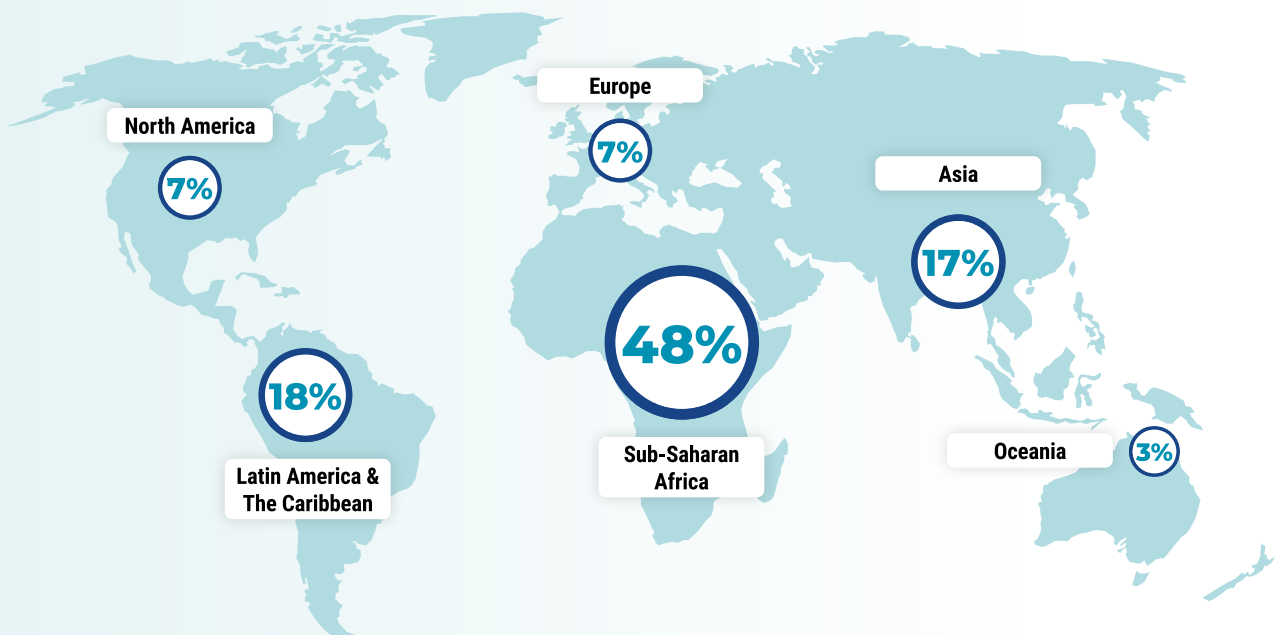


## Sector

The enterprises in our sample represent a variety of business sectors. The majority (nearly 90%) operate in one of the following six sectors: agribusinesses, financial services, power manufacturing, consumer services, and technology enterprises. The remaining 10% includes a longer tail of sectors.

## Regions

The sample skews towards enterprises with headquarters in Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, nearly 20% of the sample represents enterprises with head offices in Latin America and another 20% in Asia.



# BENCHMARKS

GENDER COMMITMENT

GENDER EXTERNALLY

GENDER INTERNALLY

## I. GENDER COMMITMENT

The vast majority (**90%**) of enterprises in the Nexus dataset are **2X Challenge criteria<sup>4</sup> compliant**, meaning they meet at least one of the 2X criteria.

Yet on average, **enterprises have taken up only about a third of the Gender Smart Nexus-recommended measures** for gender inclusion.

Today, 2X is an important entry point. And there is **considerable room for enterprises to further grow their intentionality around gender inclusion beyond the 2X criteria**. Throughout the remainder of this report, we dive into the specific opportunities, based on what some peer enterprises are already doing.

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**2X Challenge**

**What is a 2X Challenge investment?**  
It fulfills one of these criteria:

- ENTREPRENEURSHIP**  
**51%** or more women ownership or business founded by a woman
- LEADERSHIP**  
**20-30%** or more women in senior leadership positions
- EMPLOYMENT**  
**30-50%** or more women in the workforce and a programme supporting women's employment
- CONSUMPTION**  
products or services that specifically or disproportionately benefit women
- Investments through funds or financial intermediaries are eligible when at least **30%** of businesses supported meet the 2X criteria
- SUPPORTED BY**  
European Investment Bank  
The EDI bank

### Overall Gender Commitment

**72%** of enterprises reported that gender equality and/or women's empowerment is either **core** to, or is an aspect of, their enterprise's values. Yet despite being an enterprise value, **less than half** of enterprises reported taking concrete steps for gender equality.

Concrete steps for gender equality can include: hosting gender-related training, allocating budget to work on gender equality, building systems and training staff to produce sex-disaggregated statistics to use for strategic planning, or setting up internal units specifically charged with better serving the woman client segment. Additional steps are listed in the graph below.

### Measures Taken by the Business's Leadership for Advancing Gender Equality and/or Women's Empowerment (N = 184)

Included a focus on gender equality and/or women's empowerment as part of business's values or principles

72%

Released a public statement / press release / blog outlining the business's commitment to gender equality and/or women's empowerment

39%

Carried out gender-related trainings or unconscious bias trainings for staff

38%

Allocated budget to work on advancing gender equality (i.e., by assigning a % of one or more people's time to gender-related work.)

30%

Explicitly made gender equality/inclusion/ empowerment one of its top 5 priorities

27%

Regularly allocated time in team meetings to discuss gender equality actions

23%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80%

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### Gender Strategy Priorities

Nearly all (92%) enterprises' gender strategies are focused on promoting gender inclusion internally (i.e. within their organization). Over half (55%) of enterprises' gender strategies also have an external lens to promoting gender inclusion (i.e. with regard to clients or customers).

Among those strategies promoting gender inclusion externally, some enterprises are looking at how their products and services can close gender gaps in financial inclusion, some are looking at how their products and services can enable women to access clean energy and the benefits thereof, while others are looking at how they can equip women with high impact technology-based solutions.

### II. GENDER EXTERNALLY

Looking at the most common gender-forward business practices Nexus tracks, many of these are client/customer facing:

More than half (57%) of respondents reported offering products or services intended to benefit women and/or girls and half (53%) reported targeting women as a market segment.

Less than half (39%-45%) of enterprises adapt sales, marketing, product design, customer service offerings, or take other measures to benefit women.

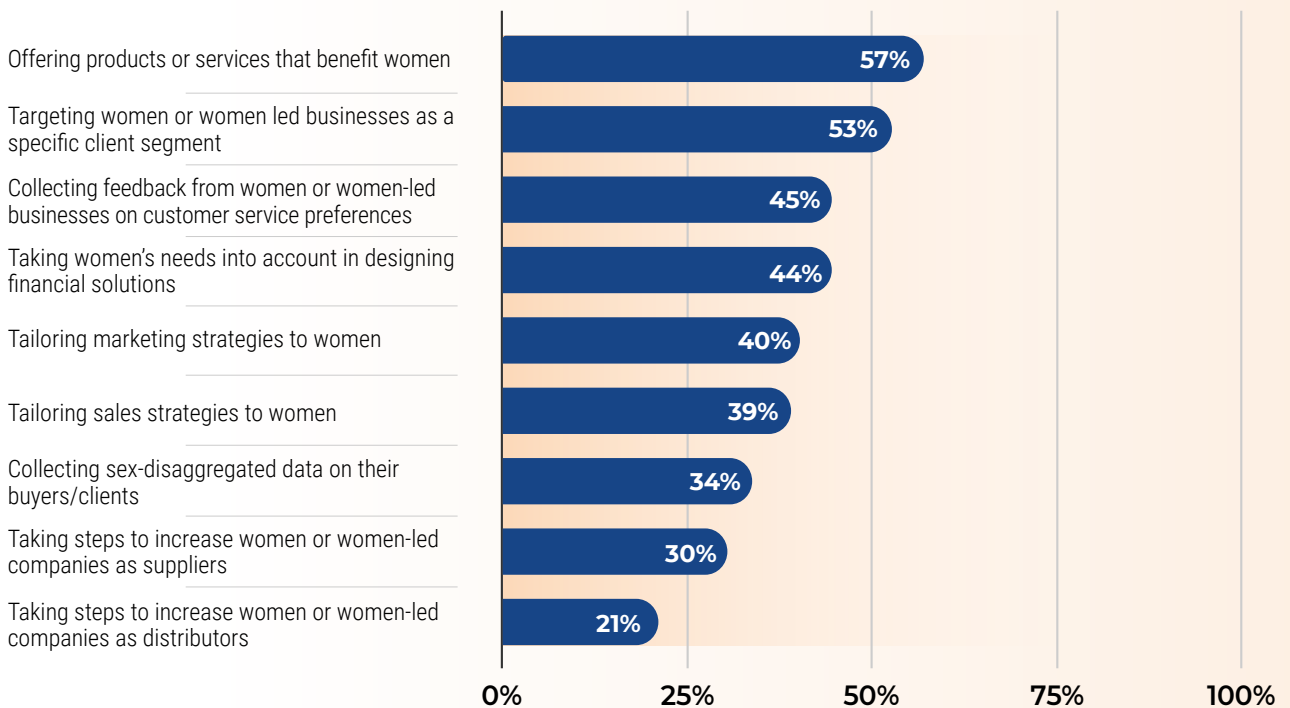
The data indicates that a lack of information is likely hindering wider adoption of these gender-forward business practices. Of the enterprises in our sample, **51% have never received training** on gender and another **40% have received only one-off support**. Only **9%** reported having **had the type of longer-term assistance** that can help drive deeper organizational change.

Those that undertook gender-forward business practices and reported results see increases in:

- ◆ brand recognition,
- ◆ client satisfaction, and
- ◆ sales revenue.

## Adoption of Gender Forward Business Practices Among Respondents (N = 184)

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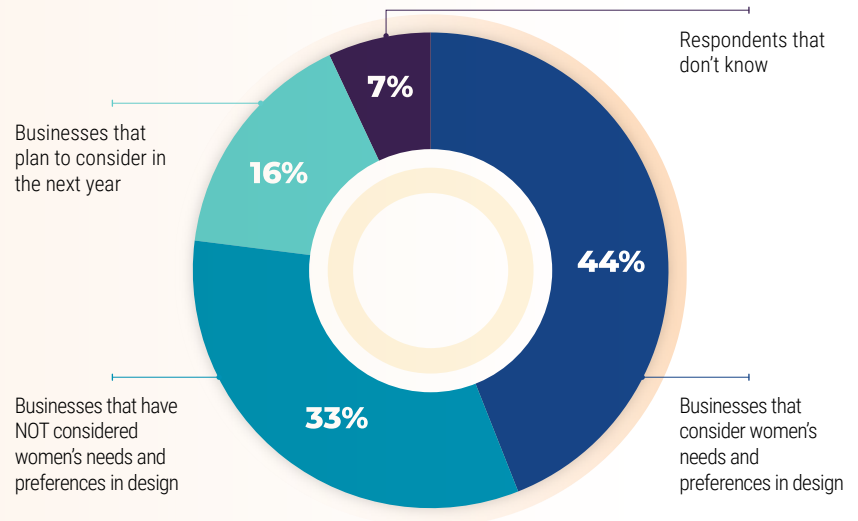


## Solutions Designed for Women

Designing solutions for women can look like offering products or services that benefit women or girls and can look like targeting women as a market segment. With **more than half** of respondents reporting doing one or the other of these, we see that **designing solutions for women is the most commonly adopted business practice** among the enterprises in our dataset.

Of particular note, **developing specific financial service offerings around the needs of women customers appears to be a growing trend**. **44%** of respondents that are offering financing to their customers already consider women's needs and preferences in developing their customer financing solutions, while another **16%** report plan to seek such feedback from women in the next year.

## Women's Needs and Preferences in the Design of Financing Solutions Within Businesses That Offer Customer Financing (N = 90)



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Despite the common practice of designing solutions for women, **the majority of the enterprises that are doing so might not have all the information they need.** For example, of the **53%** of respondents that are targeting women as a market segment, **only 1 in 3 reported undertaking a gendered market analysis**, such as conducting market research on specific product or service needs of women or consulting women or women-led businesses to improve product or service design.

This step is important for the success of any customer-centric strategy because gendered market assessments allow you to understand the different priorities, needs, and constraints experienced by women customers in accessing products and services.

Turning to promising results, **among the small number of enterprises that are doing both research and targeting, those that reported seeing business outcomes saw only positive ones.** These included:

**67%** see increases in brand recognition,

**62%** see increases in client satisfaction, and

**57%** see increases in sales revenue.

It is important to note that **38%** reported they **didn't know** if their actions had led to business outcomes, most likely because they failed to track the outcomes of gender actions.

## Marketing, Sales, and Customer Services Tailored to Women's Preferences

Respondents named marketing and sales as two of the top three biggest challenges to their business growth. And while **only 40%** of enterprises **reported adapting their marketing and sales strategies to meet women's unique needs**, the majority of those that reported results see improvements in key business outcomes.

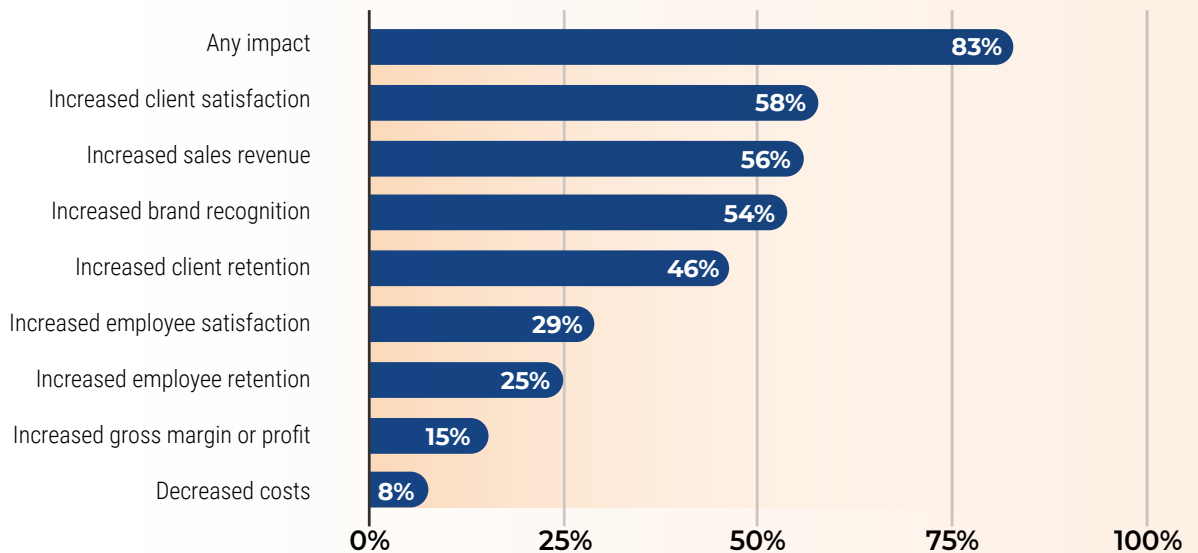
**Enterprises overwhelmingly reported positive impacts** when tailoring marketing strategies (**83%**), sales strategies (**86%**), and customer services (**95%**) to women. Impacts included:

- ◆ **improved client satisfaction,**
- ◆ **sales revenue,** and
- ◆ **increased brand recognition.**

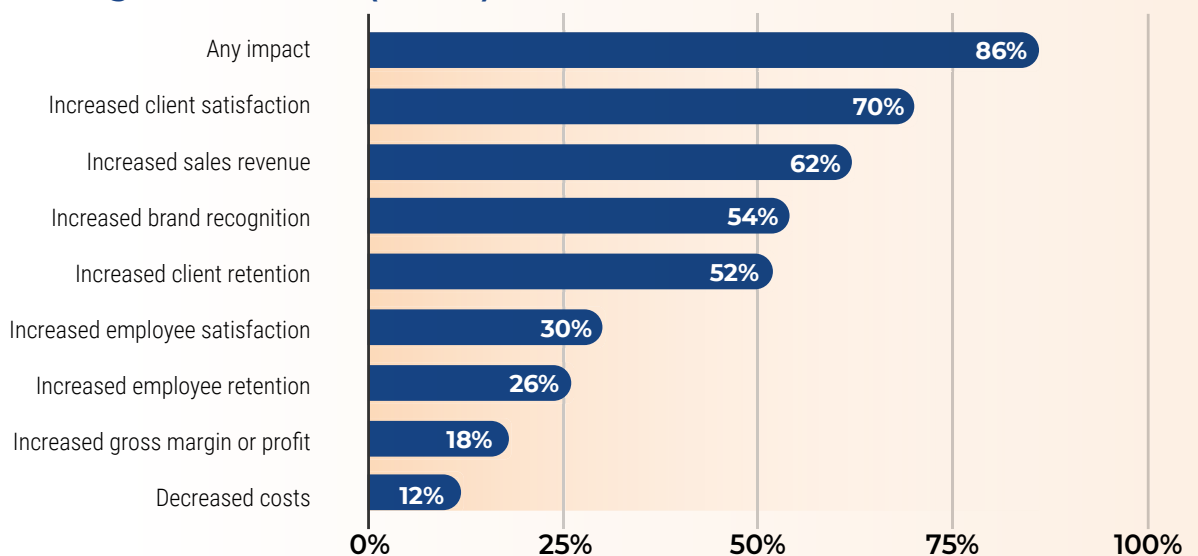
Despite these positive findings, it is important to note that **a minority** of respondents said that they **see no positive impact** (**12%** for tailored marketing strategies to women, **10%** for tailored sales strategies to women, and **3%** for customer services tailored to women) and between **30%** and **35%** said that they **didn't know**, likely because they had not measured the results.

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### Reports of Positive Impacts on Business Performance: Tailoring Marketing Strategies to Women (N = 52)



### Reports of Positive Impacts on Business Performance: Tailoring Sales Strategies to Women (N = 50)



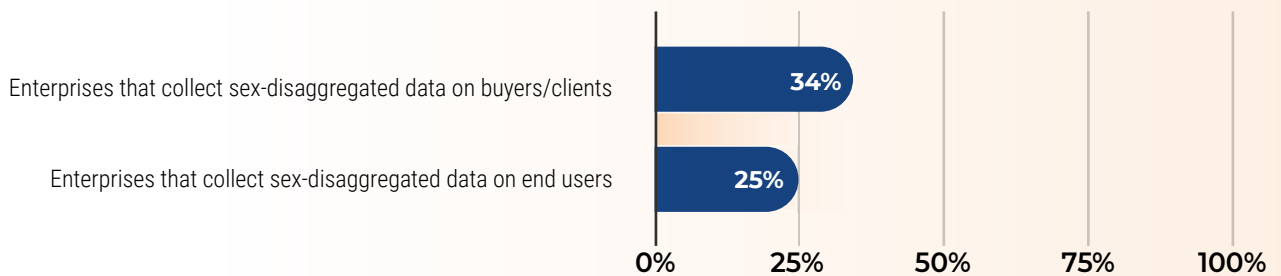
Additionally, we see a commitment to client responsiveness as part of these targeting efforts. **A considerable percentage of enterprises (45%) have solicited feedback from women** and/or women-led businesses regarding their customer service experiences. Most of these enterprises (**82%**) **use this data to improve their customer service offerings**.

Finally, in general, **only a third of enterprises gather sex-disaggregated data on their buyers/clients**, and only **a quarter** collect sex-disaggregated data on end users.

Gathering this data provides strategic business information (i.e. a deeper understanding of customer behavior, needs, and preferences as well as insights into how well the enterprise is serving women and men customers) that can help address business challenges and take advantage of opportunities.

## Proportion of Enterprises That Collect Sex-Disaggregated Data From Their Client Base (N = 183)

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## Gender Inclusion in the Value Chain

**Most enterprises are not yet seeking to increase the number of women-led businesses as either suppliers or distributors.** Only **30%** of respondents sought to increase their women suppliers and only **21%** their women distributors.

At the same time, **a third** of enterprises **named supply and distribution as one of their biggest challenges** for business growth.

By and large, enterprises are not yet seeing sourcing and buying more from women-run enterprises as part of the solution.

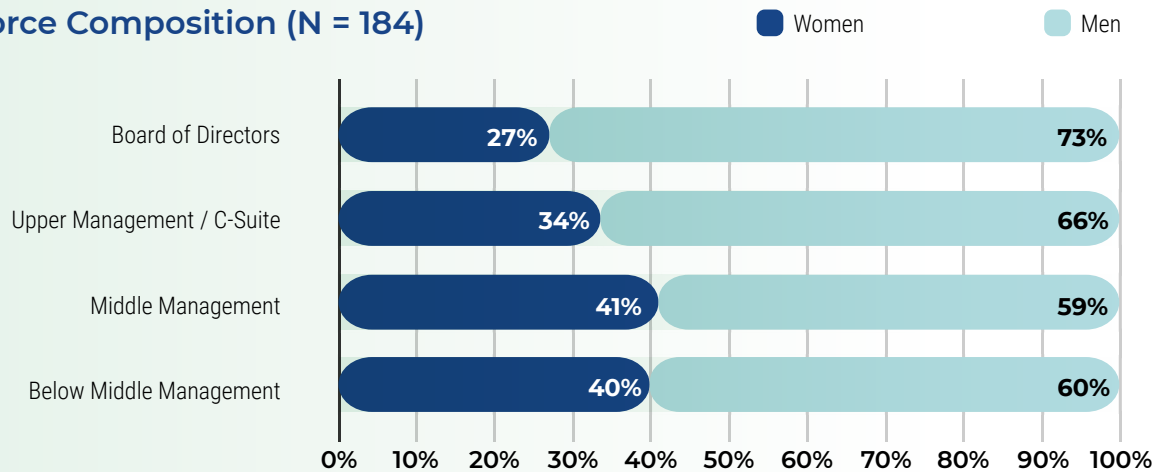
## III. GENDER INTERNALLY

### Workforce Composition

**The majority of enterprises in this Nexus dataset— nearly three-quarters —are women led<sup>5</sup>.** The average proportion of women on boards is **27%** and in upper management is **34%**.

Looking at lower levels, the average proportion of **women in middle management** is **41%** and **below middle management** is **40%**.

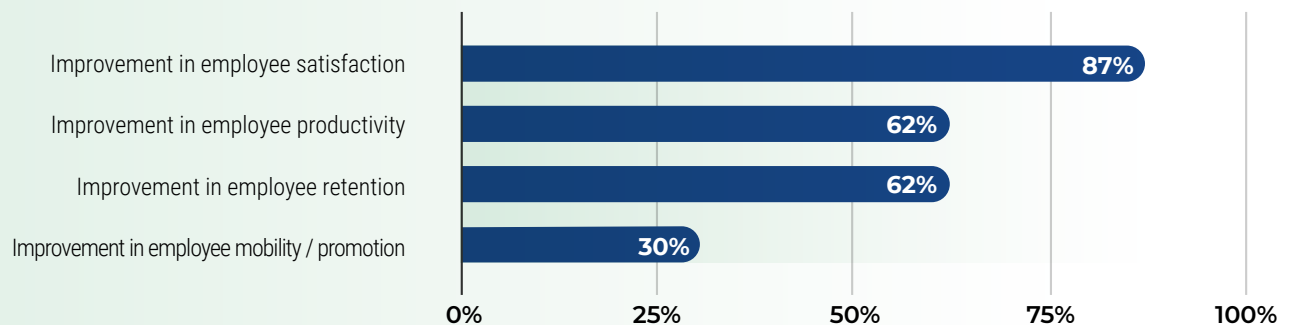
## Workforce Composition (N = 184)



While these proportions are high compared to global standards<sup>6</sup>, **the enterprises skew male, especially at higher levels of seniority.**

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## Reported Impacts From Companies That Have Perceived Positive Impacts as a Result of Formal Policies (N = 69)



### Workplace Policies

**Enterprises are most likely to formally implement workplace policies that are either required by law or adopted voluntarily to mitigate risk**, such as anti-harassment, violence, and sexual exploitation policies (58%) and non-discrimination and equal employment opportunity policies (48%).

Measures to enable workplace safety and fair treatment appear to have a positive effect on workplace culture.

**87% of enterprises that reported results of adopting gender-focused formal workplace policies reported seeing improvements in overall employee satisfaction.**

This suggests a link between measures to enable workplace safety & fair treatment and employee satisfaction.



**Enterprises are less apt to adopt formal policies that create an environment supporting women to grow and thrive**, such as wage equity (30%), flexible work (28%), and general support for parents and caregivers (13%). Many more enterprises, however, reported instituting informal practices concerning these areas.

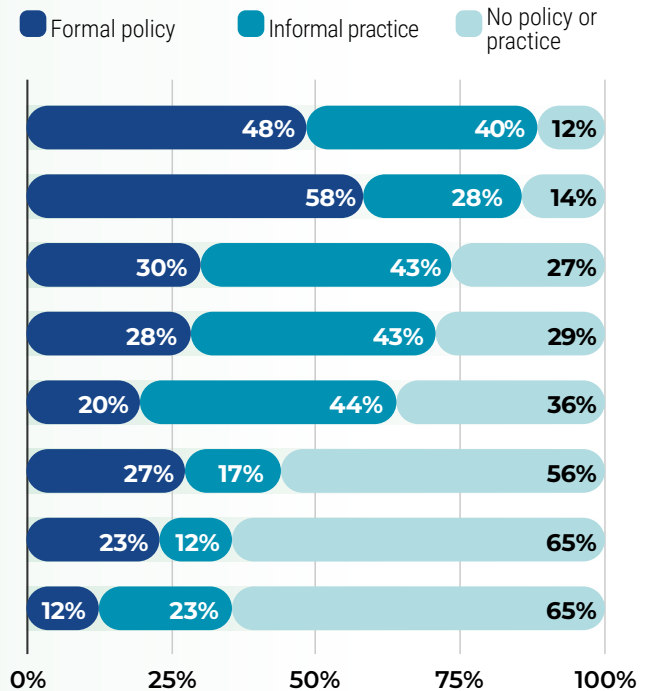
Research shows that firm size is positively associated with formalized workplace policies and likely explains low levels of formality among the enterprises in our sample which are predominantly smaller in size<sup>7</sup>. Our dataset skews heavily toward enterprises with less than 50 employees, enterprises that may find it difficult and expensive to implement formalized benefits.

**Fewer than 50% of enterprises offer (either formally or informally) maternity or paternity leave that goes beyond that required by national regulatory requirements.**

The enterprises in Nexus are heavily weighted towards micro and small enterprises (less than 50 employees), which are less likely than larger enterprises to provide parental leave due to the costs and the business disruption caused by an employee’s prolonged absence. That said, while most (186 of the world’s 192) countries offer paid leave for new mothers, leave durations vary and can be insufficient to meet women’s health and care-related needs. Furthermore, with only 109 countries offering guaranteed paid paternity leave, in almost half of the countries around the world men have to rely on their employer’s discretion<sup>8</sup>.

### Workplace Policies (N = 184)

- Non-discrimination and equal employment opportunities
- Anti-harassment, violence, and sexual exploitation
- Wage equity through paying equality for equal work, based on regular salary reviews
- Offers flexible work options (i.e., flexible hours or hours adjusted to needs)
- General support to employees as parents and caregivers (i.e., flexibility, phased return to new parents, etc.)
- Paid maternity leave beyond national regulatory requirements
- Paid paternity leave beyond national regulatory requirements
- Accommodations for nursing mothers such as breastfeeding/pumping spaces that are private, clean, safe, and available primarily for this purpose



### Workplace Practices Targeting Women Talent

**Workplace practices that target more gender-equitable hiring as well as those that help women stay and rise within the enterprise are somewhat commonly adopted. That said, the latter are less common than the former.**

Looking at the most common workplace practices targeting women talent:

- ❖ **The most common practice is using a consistent process to review job applicants**, such as using a standard set of interview questions for all job applicants, which has been adopted by **57%** of enterprises in this Nexus sample.
- ❖ **About half** of enterprises *also* have **taken steps to increase the number of women job applicants** such as through targeting women in outreach and through women's networks.

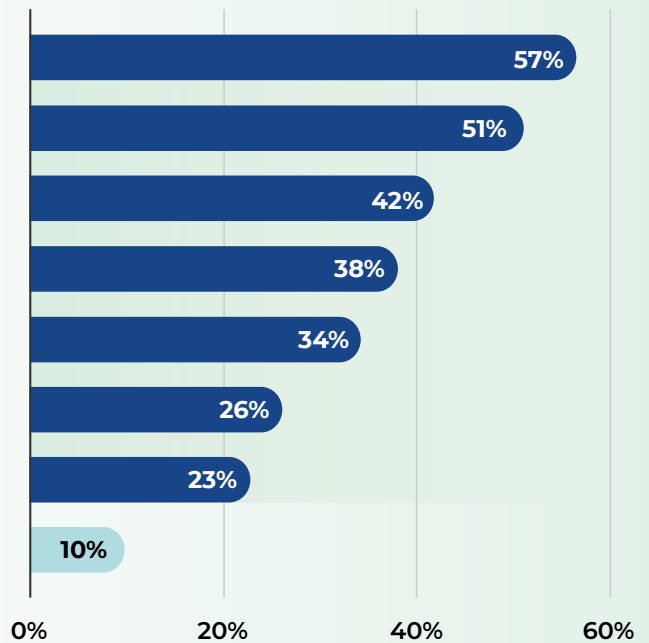
Only **10%** of respondents reported taking **no action at all**.

The focus on recruitment could be a reflection of the fact that many enterprises in Nexus are in growth stages with ambitious hiring targets. However, the relative lack of attention to measures that promote retention can be damaging to business performance and maintain an imbalance in senior management, preferencing men.

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### Workplace Practices (N = 184)

Uses a consistent process to review job applicants (i.e., using a standard set of interview questions for all job applicants)	57%
Proactively takes steps to increase the number of women job applicants, i.e., by targeting women in outreach and through women's networks	51%
Ensures there is a diverse hiring committee (including diversity on gender, age, race/ethnicity, and/or other factors)	42%
Carries out regular salary reviews relative to position, and addresses any salary disparities between men and women	38%
Proactively supports the retention and promotion of women through training and mentoring opportunities	34%
Uses clear promotion criteria that detail what is needed to be promoted to a higher job level and offers specific opportunities to bridge gaps for women	26%
Trains anyone in Human Resources and staff involved in hiring/promotion decisions on gender equality	23%
None of the above	10%



Of the enterprises that perceive positive impacts as a result of inclusive practices:

- ❖ **Nearly 80% have witnessed improvements in satisfaction among women employees** and
- ❖ **72% have seen improvements in retention of women employees.**

The heightened focus on hiring, as opposed to driving retention and promotion, is reflected in the fact that only **36%** of enterprises perceived any improvement in the mobility or promotion of women employees.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The benchmarks presented in this report show where the most committed enterprises are at with gender inclusion. Based on these benchmarks, we share the following recommendations for investors seeking to guide enterprises in implementing gender-inclusive performance strategies. We also encourage enterprises to take these recommendations up directly.

**To achieve gender integration, investors can encourage enterprises to:**

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**Move from intention to action.** While the majority of enterprises studied see gender equality as core to their business, far fewer have taken the steps necessary to operationalize these values. Small firm size may play a role, as could the number of enterprises in Nexus that are pre-EBITDA. Regardless of size, there are low-cost measures that enterprises can take that contribute to business improvements. Investments in gender technical assistance can assist in implementation.



**Look beyond 2X criteria toward opportunities for deeper organizational change.** 2X is an important entry point. At the same time, the modest level of gender-forward business practices seen among this committed sample of enterprises indicates there is considerable additional room for enterprises to grow their intentionality around gender inclusion beyond the 2X criteria.



**Use sex-disaggregated data to guide strategy.** By assuming that men's and women's interests and preferences are the same, enterprises are missing out on critical insights about their workforce (e.g. new hires, promotions, turnover rates, wage parity, and satisfaction levels) and their customer base (e.g. new product and service development, improvements in customer service, and the value of commercial partnerships with women-led enterprises). These blindspots can also indicate future growth opportunities. On the workforce side, gaps— such as differences in workplace satisfaction levels between men and women —can be signs of larger workplace culture problems that are going unaddressed.



**Establish a clear gender commitment that can be shared internally and externally.** Doing so provides clarity to women and men employees that the enterprise is undergoing a change process to level gender imbalances. This can also help attract new women clients, who feel valued by these measures, and investors seeking opportunities to support enterprises that use gender inclusion as a performance strategy.



**Use gender-focused strategies to tackle key business challenges.** Marketing, sales, and supply and distribution are the top three biggest challenges to business growth identified by enterprises in Nexus. Yet only 40% of enterprises reported adapting their marketing and sales strategies to meet women's unique needs and only 20-30% reported focusing on distribution/supply strategies that bring in more women-run businesses. The positive results named in this report point to an innovative set of actions that enterprises can be encouraged to take to outperform their competitors.



**Recognize that women's preferences vary based on demographics and other factors.** Women are a heterogeneous group (e.g. varying age, ethnicity, ability) with different needs and wants. An enterprise will get the best results by segmenting and designing its value proposition and product and service offering to speak to women's varying realities and aspirations.

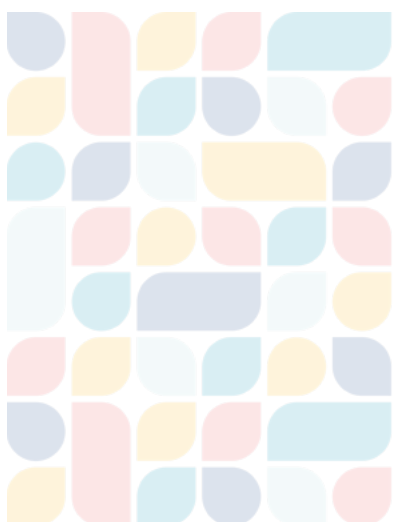
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**Go beyond mitigating risks to also formalize HR policies.** Enterprises are most likely to formalize HR policies that protect the enterprise against risks, such as anti-sexual harassment and non-discrimination policies. Our research shows that implementing such policies brings protections for the enterprise as well as for the women, as reflected in enterprises often seeing increases in workplace satisfaction. Many enterprises default to informal practices to address issues like wage equity, support to parents, and flexible work schedules. This informality can create challenges for both women and men because informal practices aren't universally applied. Instead, access to them is usually up to the individual manager's discretion. Conversely, research shows that HR formality is positively associated with owners' assessments of enterprise performance. Smaller enterprises may need technical assistance to formalize their HR policies<sup>9</sup>.



**Focus not only on recruitment but also on retention and promotion.** Enterprises are more likely to report having taken measures to increase hiring diversity than having taken measures to support promotions or level salary disparities. Committing to actions such as regular salary reviews and pay equity audits can aid in the retention and promotion of women. Not doing so risks increased expenses, due to turnover leading to higher recruitment and retraining costs, as well as persistent leadership imbalances preferencing men.



# CALL TO ACTION

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This report has shown that enterprises at all points along the gender journey have considerable additional room to grow their intentionality around gender inclusion. To do this, they need greater information about why and how to advance gender inclusion in practice. They also need long-term technical support; only 10% of respondents reported having access to long-term gender lens technical support.

We encourage investors to use this report as a powerful tool to motivate their portfolio companies along their gender journey. Enterprises will be able to see in the benchmarks the kinds of actions their peers have taken and the kinds of results they have seen. The impact data, while preliminary, will illustrate for them the multitude of ways in which gender inclusion can be a performance strategy for emerging market enterprises, including micro and small enterprises, to meet diverse business priorities.

Then, regardless of if an enterprise is among this committed sample or just getting started, having portfolio companies take an organizational self-assessment through the [Gender Smart Nexus](#) is a great first, or next, step!

# ENDNOTES

**1** Kaplan, Sarah. [“Because it’s 2017: Gender Equality as an Innovation Challenge.”](#) University of Toronto article. ND.

**2** The 2X Challenge was founded by the Development Finance Institutions from the G7 as a call to action to shift more capital towards investments that empower women in developing countries to access entrepreneurship and leadership opportunities, quality jobs, and products and services that enhance their economic participation. Investments are 2x aligned if they meet one of several criteria including women as owners or company/investment firm leaders, women as a share of the workforce with policy/programs addressing barriers to women’s employment, products/services benefitting women or investments through financial intermediaries that meet the 2X criteria.

**3** The Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs) are a set of principles offering guidance to businesses on how to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community.

**4** For more information on the 2X Challenge criteria, see <https://www.2xchallenge.org/criteria>.

**5** Value for Women uses the 2X Challenge definition when classifying an enterprise as “women led”. The 2X Challenge definition is: at least 30% of senior management being women or 30% of board members being women (leadership criteria) or having a woman founder or when more than 50% is owned by women (ownership criteria).

**6** See, for example, the [2X Challenge criteria](#).

**7** Nguyen, T. V., & Scott E. Bryant. (2004). [“A Study of the Formality of Human Resource Management Practices in Small and Medium-Size Enterprises in Vietnam.”](#) SAGE Journals, 22 no. 6 (ND): 595–618.

**8** Miller, Claire Cain. [“The World ‘Has Found a Way to Do This’: The U.S. Lags on Paid Leave.”](#) The New York Times. October. 25, 2021.

**9** Nguyen, T. V., & Scott E. Bryant. (2004).

