



Gender and Inclusion in Agribusiness Value Chains

For agribusinesses operating in East Africa, a focus on gender and social inclusion is not merely a compliance issue; it is a critical lever for maximizing productivity, securing supply, and verifying impact for blended finance. Women constitute a significant portion of the agricultural labor force—particularly in smallholder production and post-harvest processing—but often face systemic barriers to resources, market access, and decision-making power.

Gender and Inclusion must be embedded into the **Impact Measurement & Management (IMM)** and **Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD)** systems to move beyond simple headcount towards measurable empowerment.

1. Integrating a Gender and Inclusion Lens into IMM

The goal of gender-smart metrics is to track who benefits, who decides, and who controls the resources within the value chain.

A. Gender-Smart KPIs

To capture empowerment and equity, agribusinesses must move past standard operational metrics and adopt **gender-smart KPIs**.

Standard KPI	Gender-Smart KPI	Value Proposition
Smallholders Reached	% of Female Smallholders who own the land title/asset.	Tracks women's <i>control</i> over productive assets, not just their participation.
Training Hours	% of Training Hours delivered to women's groups on <i>financial literacy and decision-making</i> .	Tracks access to high-value knowledge, addressing empowerment barriers.
Average Income Uplift	Average Income Uplift for smallholders, <i>disaggregated by gender</i> .	Ensures interventions are not increasing the gender pay gap. Example: A client achieved a 9% average income uplift in year one for tracked smallholders.
Employee Turnover	Turnover Rate for staff and contractors, <i>disaggregated by gender and ethnicity</i> .	Highlights retention issues or non-inclusive hiring practices, a key part of the social pillar.

B. The Theory of Change

A gender-informed **Theory of Change** is required, ensuring that gender and inclusion are a **cross-cutting lens** in the impact pathway, not a separate silo. This helps secure the verified impact needed for **blended finance tranches**.

2. Smallholder Engagement and Resource Access



For **outgrower programs** and supplier networks, the focus must shift from simply engaging the household to engaging women as economic actors.

- **Addressing Input Bias:** In many regions, agricultural inputs and extension services are provided to the male head of the household, even when women do most of the field labor. A **gender-smart approach** ensures that inputs (e.g., seeds, credit, training) are accessible to women directly, with communication channels designed to suit their time constraints and literacy levels.
- **Empowering Women's Producer Groups:** Working directly with female-led or mixed-gender producer groups can amplify voices and provide collateral for small loans. This strengthens the **supply chain** and improves buyer scorecards.
- **Data Collection Protocols:** When conducting **baseline surveys** and monitoring, the data collection protocols must ensure that women are interviewed privately and separately from the male head of household to capture accurate information on decision-making, income control, and potential vulnerabilities.

3. Grievance Mechanisms and Human Rights

Gender and inclusion are inherently linked to the **Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD)** process, particularly under IFC Performance Standard 2 (Labor) and PS 7 (Indigenous Peoples).

A. Accessible Grievance Mechanisms

A well-designed **Grievance Mechanism** must be accessible and trusted by all groups, particularly vulnerable smallholders and temporary female workers.

- **Design Considerations:** The mechanism must include multiple reporting channels (e.g., in-person, local language text/Whatsapp, or anonymous boxes) and ensure **confidentiality and non-retaliation**.
- **Gender-Sensitive Handling:** The ESMS should mandate that grievances related to sexual harassment, discrimination, or unequal pay are handled by trained, female case workers where appropriate. Example: One client saw **grievance line usage tripled** after implementing appropriate protocols.

B. Labor and Supply Chain HRDD

The **Supply Chain & Human Rights Due Diligence** service should specifically screen for risks like forced labor, unequal pay, and gender-based violence (GBV). This is critical for improving **buyer scorecards** in export markets and ensuring compliance with human rights frameworks. By applying a robust gender and inclusion lens across all ESG processes, agribusinesses not only meet lender requirements but drive verifiable economic transformation within their value chains.