



**ADVANCING GENDER
MAINSTREAMING IN AND
THROUGH CHAMBERS OF
COMMERCE AND BUSINESS
MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATIONS:
Trends and Best Practices
in ACP Countries**

ICReport June 2025

Implemented by

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The ICR Facility provides technical assistance to Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCIs) and Business Membership Organisations (BMOs) in the African, Caribbean and Pacific region to foster better business conditions and support women’s economic empowerment. By creating a more favourable and gender-sensitive business environment, these efforts seek to enable both local and international businesses to increase investments, create jobs, and drive sustainable economic growth and development.

This report is part of an assignment aiming to support CCIs and BMOs to promote women’s economic empowerment and gender equality. The report seeks to identify successful examples and good practices as well as to highlight challenges and recommendations for CCIs and BMOs to promote gender within their own organisations, within their member organisations, and in public-private dialogues. The assignment also entails providing relevant tools and guidance to further support CCIs and BMOs in this regard.¹

(1) <https://www.icr-facility.eu/knowledge-hub/resources/>

ABBREVIATIONS

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
AACCSA	Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations
ANDI	National Business Association of Colombia
BEC	Barbados Employers' Confederation
BMOs	Business Membership Organizations
BUSA	Business Unity South Africa
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCI BENIN	Chambre of Commerce and Industry of Benin
CCIs	Chambers of Commerce and Industry
CGECI	Confédération Générale des Entreprises de Côte D'Ivoire
CNCS	National Chamber of Commerce and Services of Uruguay
CONFIEP	Confederación Nacional de Instituciones Empresariales Privadas
ECAM	Employers' Consultative Association of Malawi
EU	European Union
FUE	Federation of Uganda Employers
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ICR	Investment Climate Reform
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOE	International Organisation of Employers
JEF	Jamaica Employers' Federation
MEDEF	Mouvement des Entreprises de France
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OACPS	Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States
PPDS	Public-Private Dialogues
SMES	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SNV	Stichting Nederlandse Ontwikkelingsorganisatie (Netherlands Development Organisation)
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
UN	United Nations
UNACOIS Jappo	Union Nationale des Commerçants et Industriels du Sénégal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCIs) and Business Membership Organisations (BMOs) play a key role in achieving gender equality in three key areas:



1. within their own institutions



2. in their support to their members, and



3. in public-private dialogues (PPDs).

CCIs and BMOs play a key role in influencing the private sector. They work to influence policies, regulations, and industry standards, including those related to gender equality.

The ICR Facility carried out interviews and desk research to identify best practice in women's economic empowerment among CCIs and BMOs across the African, Caribbean and Pacific region. The research also identified trends and uncovered underlying barriers, opportunities and potential recommendations to further promote gender mainstreaming efforts of CCIs and BMOs.

However, our research found their progress is uneven across these three areas. Most CCIs/BMOs are strong in one area, with very few excelling in two. Success is often made possible thanks to leadership buy-in, formal gender commitments (such as having a gender strategy), and institutional gender competencies, often facilitated or triggered by donor support. For those that are more nascent in their development, many are on their way to have a more systemic focus.

Our research found some inspiring examples. For instance, some CCIs/BMOs promote gender equality in their organisations by encouraging women leaders, offering work-life balance and flexible work arrangements. In supporting their members, some excel at helping businesses address gender-related barriers, such as working with women's groups and combating gender-based violence. Others offer gender-focused training, awards and certifications to recognise workplaces free of gender-based violence. When it comes to public-private dialogues, some CCIs/BMOs lead gender advocacy, use data to drive discussions, and help women's organisations engage in these dialogues.

However, the pursuit of mainstreaming gender is far from being challenge-free. CCIs/BMOs face numerous barriers, including limited awareness and institutional capacities and structures to promote gender mainstreaming. The lack of acknowledgement that there is a solid business case alongside limited buy-in for gender equality often translates to it being deprioritised and under-resourced in addition to lacking a systemic, rather than ad hoc focus. Other issues are deep-rooted socio-cultural norms that tend to seep into organisations – including CCIs/BMOs and their members – which translate into prevalent gender biases and organisational resistance to focusing on gender (which may be even seen as an externally imposed agenda).

Going forward, recommendations for CCIs/BMOs to further promote gender equality include:

1. **Ensuring buy-in and adopting an intentional approach** through gender-responsive organisational policies, strategies, culture and structures, backed up with adequate gender expertise and resources;
2. **Having a clear roadmap and vision** for gender-related change as well as a system to measure and steer progress;
3. **Managing change associated with integrating gender**, while departing from a solely numeric focus (gender being “checking the box”) to focusing on addressing systemic barriers, changing minds, and promoting inclusive cultures. A key part of that would be to establish and promote the business case for gender and how it is an imperative for business and inclusive growth;
4. **Transforming services to members** by analysing and offering tailored services to tackle the different gendered barriers, needs, and aspirations of different segments of women and men members;
5. **Mastering advocacy** which would be a door-opener for influencing and shaping gender-responsive policies, resulting in systemic changes.

As for development partners and other stakeholders, it is key to focus on building gender-related capacities and offering training and knowledge – including on the business case for gender – while offering tailored support that meets the diverse needs of different CCIs/BMOs, based on where they are in their gender journey.

The report is organised as follows: [Section 1](#) provides an overview of gender issues in ACP countries along with the business case for gender and the role of CCIs/BMOs in this regard; [Section 2](#) outlines the study methodology and limitations; [Section 3](#) highlights the current state and emerging trends in mainstreaming gender in CCIs/BMOs while outlining success factors and triggers; [Sections 4, 5](#) and [6](#) lay out key staff insights and best practice examples along three axes: promoting gender institutionally; supporting members in promoting gender mainstreaming; and gender-responsive PPDs. [Section 7](#) highlights key challenges facing CCIs/BMOs in their pursuit of gender mainstreaming while [Section 8](#) outlines the recommendations to further promote gender through CCIs/BMOs.



1. BACKGROUND

Women's economic empowerment

A woman is often considered to be 'economically empowered' when she can both earn her own money and decide how to spend it.

To succeed and advance economically, women need the skills and resources to compete in markets. They also need fair and equal access to services offered by socio-economic institutions (such as banks and business support organisations) as well as the ability to influence decision-making within these institutions (including policy-making institutions). On top of this, social norms often discriminate against them and put them at a disadvantage economically. To have the power and agency to benefit from economic activities, women need to have the ability to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits.^{2/3}

In this report, the terms women's economic empowerment (sometimes abbreviated to WEE) and gender mainstreaming are used interchangeably and refer to efforts to promote gender equality within institutions and their work.

Overview of key gender issues in the ACP region

In recent years, policymakers, practitioners in international cooperation and academics worldwide have become increasingly aware of the crucial role gender equality plays in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, the goals related to education, poverty reduction, health and inclusive economic growth. This growing awareness, alongside the recognition that embracing gender equality benefits families, societies and economies, has led to many governments and organisations – including those we are focusing on in this report – prioritising women's economic empowerment.⁴

Many governments and organisations are – with varying levels of advancement – putting this into practice by developing gender policies and strategies as well as measuring their progress. However, discriminatory gender norms in business and financial services, and, in some cases, gender-biased industrial policies⁵ persist in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) region. In some countries, favourable laws aim to promote women's economic independence. Yet even when gender-responsive laws are introduced, in many cases their impact has been low because of many factors, including lack of awareness of the laws, unfavourable social norms and complex procedures.

One of the most significant issues mirrored globally is the burden of childcare, as well as caring for elderly and sick people, falling mainly on women. This stems from social norms, as well as lack of adequate and affordable social infrastructure and services, such as childcare, and health and social care facilities. This results in persistent time poverty for women, meaning many of them have little time available to develop income-generating activities.⁶

(2) Anne Marie Golla, Anju Malhotra, Priya Nanda, and Rekha Mehra. *Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment Definition, Framework and Indicators*. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). 2011.

(3) International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), *Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment*, 2018

(4) Anne Marie Golla, Anju Malhotra, Priya Nanda, and Rekha Mehra. *Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment Definition, Framework and Indicators*. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). 2011.

(5) "For example, participants from the Pacific region highlighted how, although culture is a vital component of daily life for Pacific islanders, the norms associated with it are often biased industrial policies against women. This in turn can inhibit women from engaging in the economy. This sentiment was echoed by participants from other ACP countries." *Report on the Investment Climate Reforms for Women's Economic Empowerment (ICR4WEE) Conference, July 2023*

(6) For more detailed information, refer to the ICRReport titled [Business Environment Reforms and the Care Economy: The Case of Childcare and Parental Leave Policies](#).

“ Because of being mostly in the informal sector, the influence of women entrepreneurs in decision-making levels/ political spheres becomes very limited. Formalisation is hence key, and this also requires access to finance but also accompaniment/training, including on leadership, self-confidence, business skills such as how to develop/grow business, laws, how to formalise and benefits of that, etc. ”

Interviewee

that in Sub-Saharan Africa, women-owned/led businesses make profits that are 34% lower than those made by male-owned firms. They also have fewer employees and lower revenues.⁸ This disparity is apparent in other ACP countries as well and is attributed to the multitude of barriers faced by women entrepreneurs – at multiple levels of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In addition to the socio-cultural norms and expectations, regulatory frameworks and laws often discriminate against women. For example, women may experience unequal treatment by banks.^{9/10} Such gender barriers have a spiral effect whereby inequality in one place gives momentum to inequalities in other areas.¹¹ For example, discriminatory laws or norms (such as married women being prohibited from working, unequal inheritance and land ownership, women being required by law to obey their husbands) restrict women’s economic empowerment. Also, barriers to women’s access and control over assets and property, such as land, equipment or livestock, affect their economic independence¹² at different stages of their lifecycle, and their access to finance (for example, what a daughter inherits from her parents or as a widow). The lack of access to finance in turn limits women’s ability to start, grow, and generate profits from their own businesses.¹³

Across the ACP region (and in other parts of the world too), women are often forced into and over-represented in the informal sector, in micro enterprises, and in home-based and seasonal activities, which offer small profits and have limited growth opportunities. The informal sector offers no social protection measures, such as health insurance and maternity leave, but offers the availability and flexibility for women to carry out the unpaid care work that most often falls to them rather than men.

Other barriers to women’s economic empowerment include gender-defined roles within society, stereotypes (such as assumptions that women are not good leaders or that they can’t succeed as entrepreneurs), societal expectations (that women should prioritise their families over their careers, or that they should spend their earnings on the household), limited mobility (due to less access to transport and the need to stay near their homes to undertake family responsibilities), and limited social networks outside their families (which reduces their chances of getting business leads, financial services or market information). For example, an International Labour Organization (ILO) report revealed that 20% of men and 14% of women globally believe that it is unacceptable for a woman to have a paid job outside the home.⁷

Assumptions like these have a direct impact on women’s economic empowerment by shaping their career choices as well as their prospects to progress as employees or as entrepreneurs. In fact, research indicates

“ Women entrepreneurs sometimes shy away from business, they stay in the shadows, they do not want to be in the light. There is a need to offer successful business models, role models, and offer women the accompaniment, training, etc. Even in politics women are only 30% and this has to do with psychological and other cultural barriers. For example, married women would likely not want to get into politics. ”

Interviewee

(7) ILO and Gallup, *Towards a Better Future for Women and Work: Voices of Women and Men*, 2017.

(8) ICRReport - *Business Environment Reforms to Support Women-Owned Businesses in ACP Countries*

(9) CGAP, *Banking on Change: Enabling Women’s Access to Financial Services*

(10) *Women, Business and the Law 2024*

(11) UNICEF, *Gender Toolkit Integrating Gender in Programming for Every Child UNICEF South Asia*, 2018

(12) These laws come into play at different stages of a woman’s life cycle, determining what a daughter will inherit from her parents and what assets a woman can access during her marriage and as a divorcee or widow.

(13) ICR Report - *Business Environment Reforms to Support Women-Owned Businesses in ACP Countries*

As entrepreneurs, women often suffer from limited entrepreneurship skills and equitable access to relevant training, business development and mentorship opportunities. If employed in the formal sector, women are often over-represented in low skilled jobs (which are more vulnerable to redundancy, particularly with the expansion of artificial intelligence and other technologies), face bias and discriminatory policies and practices, and are often paid less than their male counterparts even if they are carrying out jobs of equal value.

Women's leadership is limited in many sectors (including in sector representative bodies, such as those for cooperatives) and in decision-making institutions such as ministries and local government. This then limits women's ability to participate in decision-making processes, highlight the role of women in their sectors (which is otherwise often undervalued), or to advocate for change to more gender-sensitive policies and laws.¹⁴



For more information about gender issues facing women in the labour market, including as entrepreneurs, refer to the ICR reports [Business Environment Reforms to Promote Equal Opportunities for Women in the Labour Market](#) and [How to make the Business Environment work for Women's Economic Empowerment](#).

The business case for gender mainstreaming

Women bring great value to the workforce in both the formal and informal sectors. **Research demonstrates that gender diversity delivers substantial benefits at enterprise, national and global levels.** Companies that promote gender diversity on boards, in leadership and decision-making roles benefit from improved business and financial performance, innovation and employee retention. Moreover, gender diversity allows businesses to address the global talent shortages in various industries.¹⁵ In fact, gender diversity fosters a variety of perspectives and ideas, and therefore promotes creativity, innovative solutions, and improved problem-solving. All of these drive business results and success. Research by McKinsey highlights that gender-diverse teams are 21% more likely to outperform their counterparts, are more innovative and profitable.¹⁶ It also points out that companies with more than 30% of women in their executive teams are more likely to outperform those with fewer women. This translates to a significant performance differential of 48% between the most and least gender diverse companies.¹⁷ The 2019 ILO and International Organisation of Employers (IOE) report, *Women in Business: The Business Case for Change*, highlights that gender diversity correlates with financial success, notably enhanced problem-solving and creativity.¹⁸ Credit Suisse's comprehensive analysis of 2,360 global companies found that those with at least one female board member outperformed others by 26% in share price performance over six years.¹⁹

(14) International Labour Organization (ILO), *Promoting Women in Business and Management: A Handbook for National Employers' Organizations*

(15) International Labour Organization (ILO), *Women in business: Gaining Momentum*. 2015.

(16) McKinsey. (2020). *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*

(17) Ibid

(18) International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). *Women in Business: The business case for change*. 2019.

(19) The Credit Suisse, Research Institute, *CS Gender 3000: Women in Senior Management*, September 2014

Moreover, according to Catalyst research, US Fortune 500 companies which had significant women representation on boards outperformed others by 53% or more in their return on equity.²⁰ Furthermore, **equitable and inclusive workplaces have improved employee engagement, satisfaction and retention (and this means reduced staff turnover and associated costs). Employees are, in fact, more likely to make extra efforts when they feel that promotions are awarded fairly.**²¹ Research demonstrates that in diverse and inclusive workplaces, employee intent to stay increases by 20% and team commitment and collaboration by 50%.²² Such inclusive, supportive and fair workplaces tend to be more attractive for potential employees. Lastly, adhering to inclusive workplace practices helps to mitigate the risk of legal disputes or penalties due to discrimination and inequality.²³

Apart from their role as employees and employers, women have a strategic role to play as consumers.²⁴ As Deloitte research demonstrates, women represent the largest emerging market whereby they influence about 80% of household buying decisions worldwide (whether they work outside the home or not) corresponding to more than \$20 trillion of total consumer spending globally.²⁵ **To tap into this and other untapped markets, a gender diverse workforce is proven to help organisations better understand and address the preferences of diverse customer demographics.**²⁶ Furthermore, according to the World Economic Forum project of 2017,²⁷ reducing the global gender gap in labour market participation by 25% by 2025 could add an additional \$5.3 trillion to global GDP. This confirms that the growth of women in employment is positively associated with GDP growth.²⁸ This growing evidence across continents highlights the benefits of gender equality and diversity, making this issue increasingly prominent.

The role of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Business Membership Organisations

As intermediaries between business, governments and civil society actors, Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCIs) and Business Membership Organisations (BMOs) have an unmatched influence on the private sector, through both their members (which are either businesses or business associations) and via the broader business community. In addition to leading by example in the way they manage their own organisations, CCIs and BMOs play a key role in advocating for and supporting their members in promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Such support may include training, guidance, knowledge sharing, demonstrating best practices, and highlighting the business case for gender equality and women's economic empowerment.²⁹ It may also include supporting and providing services to women-led businesses and business associations. They play a key role in shaping national regulatory and policy frameworks and industry standards. They can advocate for a more gender-responsive, enabling business environment (such as loans or insurance that meet the needs of women entrepreneurs) and the need for more gender-specific data, such as information about

(20) Catalyst Report, 2011 Catalyst Census, Fortune 500 Women Executive Officers and Top Earners, December 2011.

(21) Kitterman, T. (2023). Fairness leads to higher levels of well-being and productivity at best small and medium workplaces. *Great Place to Work*

(22) Gartner. (2012). *Drive results through workforce diversity*

(23) Dauth, T., Schmid, S., Baldermann, S., & Orban, F. (2023). Attracting talent through diversity at the top: The impact of TMT diversity and firms' efforts to promote diversity on employer attractiveness. *European Management Journal*, 41(1), 9–20.

(24) American Chamber of Commerce in France and BIAC, 2012, *Putting All Our Minds to Work Harnessing the Gender Dividend - The Business Case*

(25) Deloitte (G. Pellegrino, S. D'Amato, A. Weissberg) *Gender Dividend: Making the business case for investing in women*, 2011, p.14.

(26) McKinsey. (2020). *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*

(27) *Global Gender Gap Report 2017*, World Economic Forum

(28) International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). *Women in business: The business case for change*. 2019.

(29) *Including through leveraging on existing initiatives and principles such as the UN Global Compact and the Women's Empowerment Principles*

women entrepreneurs.³⁰ They may also promote the visibility of the role of women and highlight gendered barriers in the private sector, including in specific sectors, while playing a convening role to strengthen the voice of women and women’s business associations to advocate for their interests and to take part in public-private dialogues. They may also promote gender champions, successful examples of gender-responsive businesses and pioneering women entrepreneurs, for example, through recognition awards, in collaboration with other stakeholders.³¹



For more information about gender issues facing women entrepreneurs in general and in taking part in public-private dialogues, refer to the ICReport [Promoting Women’s Organisations into Public-Private Dialogues in Order to Foster Women’s Economic Empowerment in ACP Countries](#).

Considering the pivotal role of CCIs and BMOs in promoting gender equality, it is key to support these organisations to achieve gender mainstreaming within their own organisations and through their work with their members. It is also important to reinforce their capacities for advocacy for reforms to further promote gender equality within their institutions, sectors and countries. This would be best achieved through a comprehensive approach which encompasses awareness-raising about the need for gender equality as well as about ways to assess gender mainstreaming efforts and to devise gender strategies and action plans. Through a demand-driven approach, this should be complemented by providing action-oriented, practical tools and tailored mentorship to support gender mainstreaming in relevant areas, such as monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and human resources.



(30) The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). *Women in business: How employer and business membership organizations drive gender equality*

(31) International Labour Organization (ILO), *Promoting Women in Business and Management: A Handbook for National Employers’ Organizations*

2. METHODOLOGY

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, including a combination of primary qualitative data collection and desk research for secondary data.

The qualitative primary data collection was conducted through virtual key informant interviews with 11 CCIs and BMOs: seven were in Africa, two in the Caribbean, and one in the Pacific, as well as one global stakeholder. Research participants were identified to ensure geographical representation across the ACP region, and a diversity of maturity level and organisational structures, among others. The interviewee list is in Annex 1.

The aim of the desk research was to analyse a variety of relevant publications, resources, reports and materials which provided evidence of best practices for women's economic empowerment across the ACP region.

The analysis conducted was primarily qualitative, taking a thematic approach whereby findings from the desk research and from the interviews were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes, patterns and insights. Triangulation was adopted to cross-verify results, identify trends and uncover key underlying barriers, opportunities and potential recommendations to further promote gender mainstreaming efforts of CCIs and BMOs.

Limitations

To reach as many relevant stakeholders as possible while covering the ACP region, the research was conducted virtually. This enabled the researchers to undertake in-depth qualitative interviews. Unfortunately, the online nature also has limitations. Not all contacts responded or had the availability to participate in calls. To further enrich findings and cross-verify results, the researchers leveraged secondary data and drew upon insights and lessons learnt from 22 interventions carried out by the ICR Facility with CCIs and BMOs.



3. CURRENT STATE OF EFFORTS TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Emerging practices and trends

Our research reveals that efforts of CCIs and BMOs to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the ACP region have intensified over time, with a multitude of focus areas including promoting gender-responsive policies and gender diversity, offering gender-responsive services to members, and fostering gender-responsive public-private dialogue mechanisms. Overall, most CCIs and BMOs that we interviewed have some level of awareness of gender equality and are making efforts to promote it, towards different axes, internally, in their support to members, and/or through public-private dialogues. Even for those that have only limited activities to promote this agenda, many are on their way to have an increased, systemic focus (for example, they are currently conducting a gender assessment or are beginning to integrate gender in their organisational strategy). Progress is often more difficult for smaller CCIs and BMOs, which tend to have limited resources, and for those that have received less donor support.

“ Thanks to the national-level advocacy including by the President, there is an increasingly conducive environment for promoting gender. For example, in the annual women leadership conference, there will be one keynote speaker and two panellists who are men as gender equality is not [solely] a women's affair. So, such panels will allow exchange opportunity with counterparts including on, for example, how they broke the glass ceiling and advise on better ways to do advocacy. ”

Grace Nabakooza, Head Employment Relations & Legal, Federation of Uganda Employers

Although they are at different development stages, most CCIs and BMOs pursue gender integration on one axis – at an organisational level, through support to their members, or in public-private dialogues – rather than on multiple axes. Therefore, their development stages are not uniform across those areas. For example, one CCI could be advanced in gender-responsive public-private dialogues but carry out very limited gender-related work with its members.

That said, a few advanced CCIs and BMOs have a more systemic gender focus. They may have a gender policy or strategy, commitment to gender equality at leadership level and competent gender expertise within their organisation plus substantial gender equality efforts on multiple axes. These multiple activities tend to be related so that an advancement in one often leads to ability to promote gender equality in another area. For example, a CCI with advanced expertise in dealing with sexual harassment could then leverage that to advocate for policies to combat sexual harassment at a national level.

Overall, a diversity of approaches is being adopted to promote women's economic empowerment and gender mainstreaming. For example, CCIs and BMOs which are aiming to mainstream gender within their own organisations would be promoting gender diversity and women's leadership, promoting work-life balance and flexible work arrangements, as well as leading their members by example by publishing gender-related targets and objectives.

For those supporting members to promote gender mainstreaming, activities include multi-sectoral interventions to address gender barriers, particularly in collaboration with women’s groups and cooperatives, evidence- and action-oriented support to the private sector to address gender-based violence, providing gender-related training to members (including on male allyship), recognising pioneers in promoting gender mainstreaming through awards, and offering a gender-related certification.

“*The national President is a gender advocate and opens doors to having more gender equality in private and public sectors and in all economic, political, and social spheres.*”

Celia Amoussougbo, Gender Focal Point, Benin Chamber of Commerce and Industry]

For those working to develop gender-responsive public-private dialogues, approaches include evidence- and trust-based gender-related advocacy while fostering solution- and action-oriented dialogue anchored in the business case for gender equality. Whereas some advanced CCIs and BMOs aimed to promote advocacy for systemic change (ie addressing the root causes of gender-related issues), others partnered with women’s organisations to advocate for their interests through public-private dialogues. Addressing gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, and promoting gender diversity, notably through leadership and women’s entrepreneurship, are some of the recurring topics of focus through advocacy.

▶ **See Sections 4 to 6 for best practice examples and case studies of CCIs and BMOs efforts aiming to promote gender internally, in their support to members, and through public-private dialogues.**

Our research results resonate with the findings of the 2024 ILO and IOE “Women in Business: How employer and business membership organizations drive gender equality” report³² which assessed the progress made by surveyed CCIs and BMOs on gender equality and diversity over six years. In fact, the report revealed that many CCIs and BMOs recognise the business benefits and are increasingly promoting gender equality internally and with members, though more action is needed. The report includes CCIs and BMOs from all around the world.

Some of the key findings include:

- There was **an increased awareness** of the importance of gender equality among CCIs and BMOs with an increasing proportion making changes in their organisational structures, such as introducing gender focal points or teams/departments focused on gender equality.
- Popular initiatives included introducing flexible working hours, remote-working opportunities, anti-violence and harassment policies. Other initiatives included offering training on gender equality and diversity in the workplace, having a formal statement on gender equality, equal opportunities, or on diversity and inclusion, and offering extended maternity and/or paternity leave.
- The majority of CCIs/BMOs aimed to **promote gender diversity** most often through senior management teams considering gender balance in recruitment for management positions, having clear guidance for making recruitment notices gender neutral, having formal statements embedded in strategies about promoting women within the secretariat and board.
- More than 80% of CCIs/BMOs do **some advocacy on gender equality** including through providing tailored support for associations representing business women, participation in social dialogue on gender equality, conducting research into gender equality, and advocating for gender-responsive regulatory frameworks. The most popular advocacy themes of focus were on equal pay, women in leadership and diversity and inclusion. Far fewer advocated for better child care and elderly care, women’s access to finance and entrepreneurship support, or for more women and girls to pursue studies and careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

(32) The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). Women in Business: How employer and business membership organizations drive gender equality

- When it comes to gender diversity, **women are generally well-represented within CCI/BMO secretariats but notably absent at the managerial level (i.e. in decision-making positions)**. That said, the report showed a positive trend whereby the number of women managers had increased over the past two years and that 29% of CCIs/BMOs have plans or policies in place to recruit and promote women into managerial positions. On an even more positive note, 30% of CCIs/BMOs had a female CEO which, according to the survey, is correlated with a 25% increased likelihood in hiring more than 40% of women in managerial position (compared with ones with a male CEO).
- As for **women's representation on boards**, only 16% of CCIs/BMOs had a woman chair (although this had risen in recent years); the vast majority had gender-imbalanced boards. According to the report, at the rate of change, it will take about 63 years for women to represent at least 30% of all national employer and business membership organisations' boards, a missed opportunity to set an example for the business community. (According to the research, 30% of women on the board is the threshold where organisations see the advantages of having a gender diverse board, including improved decision-making (notably due to diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and thought processes, hence leading to improved profitability.)
- While nearly half of participating organisations had a demonstrated grasp of the impact of gender equality on business outcomes, more than half had yet to realise **the impact of gender equality on their bottom line**. Furthermore, many do not track their gendered impact which makes it difficult to establish an evidence-based business case for gender equality.

Success factors and triggers

Drawing upon our own research as well as others, it can be seen that key **success factors** in promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment by CCIs and BMOs include:

- 1) **Real active buy-in** (and demonstrated passion) at top level with concrete action and commitment. This opens doors, draws in resources, and makes way for intentional focus on gender equality, including but not limited to gender diversity in leadership positions and at board level.
- 2) Having **institutional capacities** to promote gender, notably having competent, passionate champions – with leadership buy-in, who are able to advocate for gender issues and to push progress forward,
- 3) The **country-level commitment** (for example, conducive laws and policies), patronage, and advocacy by influential figures (up to the level of national president) to gender equality creates a conducive overall environment and opens doors to initiatives and advocacy for more gender equality in private and public sectors and in all economic, political and social spheres.
- 4) The creation of **women's networks** to inspire other women to integrate in specific sectors/domains.
- 5) Identifying **viable business models** that respond to the needs of different segments of women and men while allowing the private sector to tap into new market segments (see the case study from Union Nationale des Commerçants et Industriels du Sénégal (UNACOIS Jappo) which follows below).

In terms of **triggers for gender equality**, development partners have increasingly focused on gender, leading CCIs and BMOs to follow their lead with the aim of receiving funding and visibility. In some cases, the private sector's interest in gaining certifications (such as the [Great Place to Work Certification](#)) and in employee engagement translated to some focus on gender and diversity. In other cases, management buy-in, such as through the relentless advocacy and passion of a leader on gender can be a key driver which then gets reflected in strategic plans and translated into focused efforts.

4. INTERNALLY: PROMOTING GENDER MAINSTREAMING WITHIN CCIS AND BMOs

This section provides an overview of examples, approaches, success factors and lessons learnt in mainstreaming gender internally within CCIs and BMOs. The approaches taken include promoting inclusive organisational culture and gender diversity among leadership and staff, fostering gender-responsive policies, and building internal capacity on gender issues.

A champion in promoting gender diversity

The Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) is a national employers' association. FUE's current business strategy has a gender and inclusivity focus. This follows FUE endorsing a gender policy in 2017 which was accompanied by extensive management commitment and support to improving gender equality. Now, within the organisation, slightly less than half of the staff are women, half of management positions are held by women, and just over half (53.8%) of board-level positions are held by women.

FUE ensures its internal policies and practices are gender responsive, for example, by ensuring gender-responsive recruitment processes and offering flexible work arrangements. Its flagship Female Future Program (FFP) aims to promote women to senior management positions and on to boards by offering nine months of mentoring. With 31 cohorts, each with 20 women, the program resulted in the development of a cadre of women leaders within FUE and beyond. FUE also organises an Annual Women Leadership Conference to facilitate knowledge-sharing and networking, and to promote best practices in supporting women leaders, notably at top management positions and on boards. [In partnership with the ICR Facility, FUE aims to identify business environment issues affecting women's leadership with the aim of informing the lobbying agenda.](#)

“ Management and board commitment on gender and inclusivity is key. The past CEO, who was a woman, was an influential advocate for gender efforts – this includes the launch of the Female Future Program. The current CEO is a man and is also on board with the topic – supporting women leaders. For example, FUE has three (out of six) heads of departments that are women and, among staff, there are slightly more men than women. In that sense, FUE is leading by example. Also, the impact of the Female Future Program is mind blowing. ”

Grace Nabakooza, Head Employment Relations & Legal, Federation of Uganda Employers

Emerging changemakers

Ethiopia’s **Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations (AACCSA)** undertook a [gender assessment with the aim of institutionalising gender mainstreaming, with support from the ICR Facility](#). Based on the findings and recommendations, AACCSA aims to sharpen its gender focus within its own organisation as well as through its member services.

In parallel and with support from the **Confederation of Danish Industries**, AACCSA aims to focus on gender diversity in member companies. This will be achieved through organising discussions with participating members on gender-responsive company policies; awareness-raising activities focused on gender and anti-harassment; and training for women entrepreneurs in the laser and textiles industry, on health and industrial safety issues, policies and procedures.

Another forthcoming changemaker on gender is the **Jamaica Employers’ Federation (JEF)** which excels in mainstreaming gender in its public-private dialogues (there is more detail about this in section 6, Fostering Gender in Public-Private Dialogues). JEF aims to address the gender pay gap, ensuring that newly recruited young women are paid equally to newly recruited young men. Going forward, JEF aims to integrate gender and youth-focussed initiatives in its five-year strategy (2025-2030). JEF notes that 70% of university graduates are women who are increasingly seeking formal employment (although they remain overrepresented in the informal sector). That said, workplace policies haven’t yet evolved to consider the needs of women employees.

Pending approval, the aim is to include:

- 1) A focus on gender and youth related legislation, taking the approach of valuing the diversity of women and men while focusing on issues in industries dominated by men and women. For example, the construction industry is male-dominated with policies designed with men in mind, whereas many women work in hospitality. This requires JEF to engage with governments and other stakeholders, such as government ministries.
- 2) A focus on education and awareness-raising about what taking a gender lens to legislation means and how to draft policies with a gender lens.



Cap Business Océan Indien is a regional organization uniting chambers of commerce and professional organizations from six Indian Ocean territories: Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles, Réunion, Mayotte, and Comoros. Founded in 2005 and based in Ebène, Mauritius, it promotes a just and resilient economic cooperation across these islands. The organization’s 2021-2026 roadmap focuses on five priority areas: Sustainable Tourism, Energy Transition, Blue Economy, Agriculture and Agro-industry, and Connectivity/Regional Value Chains. Cross-cutting themes include biodiversity, circular economy, gender, and low-carbon strategies. Building on its 2022 gender assessment and gender training for staff, the organisation launched a gender-focused project in 2024. This project encompasses data collection, training for its members and developing a gender action plan for the organisation itself as well as three of its members.

An evolving approach to integrating gender institutionally

Among its members, the **Union Nationale des Commerçants et Industriels du Sénégal (UNACOIS Jappo)** created a women’s movement, a youth movement, and an all mixed group movement hence allowing different groups (i.e. women and youth) to convene, advocate for their interests, and take part in decision-making processes. For example, the women’s movement is comprised of all women members with a national office of 25 elected women and with technical and thematic sub-offices. While this set-up has served the CCI in some aspects at the onset of its gender journey, another more integrated and efficient approach would have been to develop and implement a gender strategy – while ensuring implementation mechanisms such as processes and indicators to track progress. This encompasses efforts to promote 1) gender-responsive institutional policies and organisational strategy in addition to the full participation of women and youth at board level and general assembly, 2) member services that meet the needs of different segments of (young) women and men members, 3) (as/if needed) establishing multi-stakeholder and departmental committees to incite and track progress on different priority areas. [In partnership with the ICR Facility, UNACOIS Jappo aims to support the creation of women’s cooperatives in the agricultural sector to help them overcome challenges such as access to credit and financial literacy.](#)

Accountability for gender and leading by example

Among those leading by example is the **Mouvement des Entreprises de France (MEDEF)** which shares its gender diversity figures, targets and objectives with its membership through an annual report on gender parity, which is also presented to the board to assess progress accordingly.³³

Promoting work-life balance and flexible work arrangements

The Barbados Employers’ Confederation (BEC) aims to promote work-life balance through flexible working and time off as well as remote working. BEC introduced a formal written policy on flexible work arrangements whereby employees can work three days from the office and two days from home per week. Outside core work hours (9 am to 3 pm), employees have the flexibility to leave the office to fulfil family or personal responsibilities, such as childcare. In addition to statutory holidays, BEC offers six days of “personal leave” every year which employees can use for personal matters such as medical appointments or spending time with family. Going beyond national legislation, BEC offers up to six weeks of fully paid sick leave.³⁴

(33) IOE Position Paper: [Recommendations to foster female talent in top management levels](#), International Organisation of Employers, April 2020

(34) The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). [Women in Business: How employer and business membership organizations drive gender equality](#)

5. AMONG MEMBERS: SUPPORTING MEMBERS IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING

This section includes examples, approaches, success factors and lessons learnt in how CCIs and BMOs can support member organisations to mainstream gender. This includes efforts to promote gender-responsive member services, advocate for gender mainstreaming, raise awareness and build members' capacity on gender equality, provide gender-related resources to members, promote accountability on gender equality, and recognise gender-inclusive businesses.

Gender-responsive services, in partnership with women's organisations and groups

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Benin (CCI Benin) provides an example of promoting gender through a holistic, integrated approach.

A key turning point happened in 2021 when CCI Benin conducted eye-opening studies – including in the agri-food and digitisation sectors. Based on the findings and recommendations, CCI Benin, through its 2020-2025 strategic plan, has developed various programmes, taking into account this focus areas.³⁵

These programmes include:

- (i) the CCI Quality programme, which addresses the issue of market access and the quality approach in businesses;
- (ii) the CCI Development programme, which focuses on the digitalisation of businesses and female entrepreneurship;
- (iii) the CCI Training programme to build the capacity of business leaders, and many other programmes that address the other concerns identified by the studies.

In addition to these initiatives, the CCI Benin has implemented an Annual Gender Work Plan and has a dedicated gender focal point to coordinate its actions.

[In partnership with the ICR Facility, CCI Benin received training on gender equality and social inclusion and supported the development of a clustering strategy in the apiculture sector named “Atacora honey initiative”.](#)³⁶

With the aim of leaving no one behind, CCI Benin's activities are inclusive, gender-responsive and tailored to the needs and capacities of various segments (women, men, young people, including people with disabilities) in sectors such as trade, services, the agri-food industry, crafts and others where women are well represented. Whether they are educated or less educated, economic players in the formal or informal sector, women entrepreneurs receive support from CCI Benin.

(35) CCI Bénin also commissioned a study and developed their environmental and social policy.

(36) Other ICR Facility-supported interventions include:

- [CGECL Côte d'Ivoire](#): Conducting a study on women's representation in the industrial sector in Côte d'Ivoire.

- [FEC Congo](#): Study on the potential of crowdfunding mechanisms for start-ups and MSMEs in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

- [PNG Europe Business Council](#): Support the development of a growth strategy for the PNG – Europe Business Council.

As part of its activities, CCI Benin works closely with women's associations and groups. The various actions in favour of women entrepreneurs include:

- 1) Support for export readiness to better equip women entrepreneurs to understand the fundamentals of international trade and to familiarise them with regional and international markets.
- 2) Reinforcement of good hygiene and manufacturing practices for women entrepreneurs in the agri-food and cosmetics sectors, enabling them to obtain marketing authorisations for their products in accordance with the regulatory requirements for commercial activities in the Republic of Benin.
- 3) Capacity-building for women entrepreneurs in areas such as product packaging and labelling, accounting, taxation, digital marketing, gender and social inclusion, e-commerce and personal data protection. This has enabled women entrepreneurs to market their products while complying with regulatory requirements.
- 4) Support for the participation of women entrepreneurs in trade fairs at the national, regional and international levels to represent the value and role of women entrepreneurs, build business relationships and benefit from the rich experiences of their counterparts in the same sector.
- 5) Support for women in going through public procurement system, where women are rarely represented.

In addition, as part of its partnership with women's organisations, CCI Benin often identifies women entrepreneurs to take part in meetings and gatherings organised at national, regional and international level to represent their sector and better defend their interests on the one hand, and to give them a platform to make their voices heard on the other. This is the case of consultation frameworks bringing together public and private players.

Promoting women cooperatives as gateway to financial inclusion

As part of its offer of inclusive services to its members, **UNACOIS Jappo** aims to leverage digital channels to offer equitable access to services and market opportunities particularly for businesses in remote regions. It also offers online training on topics including financial education, bookkeeping and e-marketing.

It also seeks to promote the financial inclusion of women entrepreneurs, who tend to be overrepresented in the informal sector and who struggle to access financial services. The CCI received frequent requests from women members for assistance with financing. To help with financial inclusion, UNACOIS Jappo fostered the creation of a women's cooperative so that members could apply as a group to get financing from a local bank.

This was an ideal solution as, not only did the cooperative offer financial solutions for its women members, but the partnership between UNACOIS and a local bank offered the bank access to a previously untapped segment of more than 1,000 women who had financing needs. The financing conditions include being a member of the CCI, paying annual membership fees, and having a moral guarantee from the CCI. The cooperative provided a recognisable governance structure and enabled the bank to obtain a good analysis of the women's requirements and profiles. Ensuring the commitment of the group and building their capacity, as well as having a sound risk analysis and mitigation measures were also key.

Supporting the private sector to address gender-based violence

The **Business Coalition for Women in Papua New Guinea** was formed in 2014 by private sector stakeholders and aims to collaborate with employers to work for gender equity, safety and the empowerment of women, including to safeguard women employees against gender-based violence. Members were originally primarily large companies but, since then smaller companies have also joined as well as public and community organisations. The coalition's initiatives and services include:

1. Supporting members to conduct workplace gender audits, particularly for male-dominated industries, and to review, develop and implement sexual harassment policies.
2. Working with communities to raise awareness about gender-based violence to create systemic changes (which requires the partnership with other actors to achieve scalable impact).
3. Developing a Gender Equality, Diversity, Social Inclusion (GEDSI) toolkit to help implement practical interventions, identify gaps, and support the implementation of the government GEDSI strategy.
4. Offering women leadership training and piloting a men's allyship programme with sporting and construction companies which will be rolled out more widely.

When it comes to success factors, the buy-in from companies – notably at leadership level – is key. This was achieved through evidence-based research on the costs resulting from gender-based violence³⁷ on business, and on the benefits of addressing this issue. The coalition also recommended practical tools to support businesses to identifying and address the issue. The coalition offered solutions such as policy examples, training and guidance on how to investigate, respond and to refer in case of violence.

The role of donors in funding an eye-opening study that helped demonstrate and build the business case was important in getting the buy-in from the private sector and others. To maximise impact, it is key to bring men as allies. The coalition aims to also foster gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation by, for example, conducting a baseline for training programmes, including on attitudes of staff to gender-based violence, to capture attitude change over time.



For more information on how addressing gender-based violence improves the business environment, please refer to the [ICR Facility blog post and video](#).

⁽³⁷⁾ *Workplace responses to Family and Sexual Violence in PNG: Measuring the Business Case*, International Finance Corporation (IFC), Australian Aid, New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade Aid Program, Business Coalition for Women (BCFW), 2021 and *Gender violence in Papua New Guinea -The cost to business*, Emily Darko, William Smith and David Walker, August 2015.

Certification for businesses addressing gender-based violence

Building evidence on the cost of gender-based violence has been pursued by other organisations such as the Universidad San Martín de Porres, in partnership with GIZ, which carried out a study on the [cost of violence of women in formal micro-enterprises in Peru](#).³⁸ The research highlighted that violence towards women generates a loss of 47.3 days of productivity every year and a loss in added trade value of USD 9,130 per company. Relating to 550,000 micro-enterprises led by women, the country cost is between USD 1,982 and USD 2,497 million dollars per year, 90% of which corresponds to opportunity cost and 10% to out-of-pocket expenditure, i.e. the costs incurred because of being subjected to violence.

To that end, the **Confederación Nacional de Instituciones Empresariales Privadas (CONFIEP)** (National Confederation of Private Business Institutions) in Peru established a ‘Safe Enterprise without Violence and Discrimination Against Women’ Certification for private sector businesses to demonstrate their good practices in addressing violence and discrimination.³⁹

Recognition for gender-inclusive businesses

The **Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE)** provides gender equality training to its members in addition to helping them to develop and implement gender equality policies. FUE advocates for gender responsive policies among its members including inclusive recruitment, anti-sexual harassment and flexible working arrangements.⁴⁰ FUE offers annual awards to employers, recognising best practice in gender and inclusiveness, such as extended maternity leave (beyond the legal requirement of three months) and flexible working arrangements. Going forward, FUE aims to advocate for more streamlined national gender policies and frameworks and aims to reach out to more employers, notably ones that have limited awareness of gender equality and grasp of its business case.

Reporting to promote accountability for gender results

Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) has been offering a yearly Businesswoman of the Year Award for more than 30 years. Moreover, BUSA publishes the annual South African Women in Leadership Census as a tool to measure gender equity and equality in businesses in South Africa in addition to maintaining the largest database in South Africa on women in managerial positions at different levels. It also seeks to investigate the status of government procurement policies, practices and measures in relation to women-owned businesses while organising local national forums for networking and information sharing.⁴¹

(38) <https://www.mimp.gob.pe/empresasegura/>

(39) IOE Position Paper: [Recommendations to foster female talent in top management levels](#), *International Organisation of Employers*, April 2020

(40) [Women’s Economic Empowerment – Good Practices from National Employers’ Organisations & Partner Companies](#), IOE-ILO ACT/EMP Compilation, Appendix II – Good Practices Catalogue Continuation

(41) International Labour Organization (ILO), *Promoting Women in Business and Management: A Handbook for National Employers’ Organizations*

Efforts to promote male allyship

Another interesting example in promoting male allyship is from the **Mouvement des Entreprises de France (MEDEF)** which, in October 2015, adopted a programme titled “Patrons champions du changement” (CEO Leaders of Change) which aims to promote gender diversity in the French economic landscape. This involved the voluntary commitment of a male “champion” who would advocate among his peers to push forward gender equality. The male “champions” have the following mission: to recruit three other “champions”; to mentor three professional women within their organisations; and to continue their action within their own organisations and to monitor progress (by evaluating the change in their profits annually and reporting back at dedicated MEDEF meetings). Through male allyship, it aims to create a positive culture of change.⁴²

Comprehensive gender strategy

In 2019, the **National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI)** developed a comprehensive strategy to foster gender equality, diversity and inclusion among its members. The strategy was made up of three key pillars:

- 1. Measure to act.** ANDI conducted an annual equality, diversity and inclusion survey with members with the aim of assessing gender diversity in managerial and decision-making positions, as well as policies, and strategies to promote gender diversity and inclusion. It also provides recommendations to further promote gender diversity within organisations. The survey results are used to advocate for gender issues during public, multi-stakeholder events, including its annual forum on equality, diversity and inclusion with representation from the government as well as the private and public sectors.
- 2. Know to apply.** ANDI conducts research and interventions to promote gender equality in the world of business. For example, in 2018, ANDI published the “Closing Gaps” toolkit providing tools and guidance to help businesses assess their policies and practices with a gender lens, and to design a gender equality strategy. Workshops were delivered to provide guidance on using the tools to design gender equality strategies.
- 3. Add to transform.** ANDI forged strategic partnerships at national and international levels with various organisations, universities and governments to promote women’s leadership and gender diversity on boards. For example, ANDI’s Women’s Leadership Program, which was implemented in partnership with a Colombian university, enabled women to obtain corporate governance and leadership skills training and to reach senior decision-making positions particularly in boardrooms.⁴³

(42) IOE-ILO ACT/EMP Compilation, *Women’s Economic Empowerment – Good Practices from National Employers’ Organisations & Partner Companies*, International Organisation of Employers (IOE).

(43) The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). *Women in Business: How employer and business membership organizations drive gender equality*

6. IN PPDS: FOSTERING GENDER-RESPONSIVE PUBLIC-PRIVATE DIALOGUES

This section provides a range of examples, strategies, success formulas, and lessons learnt in promoting gender-responsive public-private dialogues (PPDs). This entails efforts to include gender issues in policy dialogues facilitated by BMOs/CCIs, advocate for gender-responsive policies and regulations, ensure gender diverse representation in PPDs, collaborate with government bodies on gender equality initiatives, and to partner with women’s business associations, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders in PPDs.

A champion in advocacy on gender issues

The **Jamaica Employers’ Federation (JEF)** has a long-standing legacy in advocacy, notably on sexual harassment, which is a persistent issue for women as employers, employees, service providers and domestic workers. Jamaica ratified ILO Convention no 189 (otherwise known as the Domestic Workers’ Convention) in 2016 and following that, JEF helped member employers to better manage their relationships with their staff.

JEF’s biggest success was when Jamaica issued a policy on sexual harassment in 2023. This stipulated that employers who did not have sexual harassment policy by 1 July 2024 would be fined 1 million Jamaican dollars. JEF was involved all the way through the legislative process, including definition sexual harassment, and participating in PPDs and social dialogues on the topic.

“ JEF has the voice of authority with relevant matters. When JEF speaks, we are listened to. ”

O’Neil Grant, Executive Director, Jamaica Employers’ Federation (JEF)

JEF raised awareness of problem, demonstrating that women were affected as employers, employees or service providers, and highlighted that this was facilitated by the power imbalance where, although women increasingly dominated management positions, men still held power at CEO and board levels. Resistance, gaslighting and downplaying the issue followed, and this was responded to through many articles and campaigns which eventually resulted in the policy being passed. Because of JEF’s success in raising awareness, some employers introduced procedures to managing sexual harassment even before the law was passed.

JEF helped to encourage adherence to the law by supporting member employers in training and raising awareness on sexual harassment. It brought in legal experts to explain the implications of the law, including how to address sexual harassment cases through a tribunal, and how to manage sexual harassment cases, and gender experts to explain sexual harassment and other concepts. JEF also helped members by training employers and staff on how they could comply with the law in developing sexual harassment policies (for example by providing policy templates), as required by the law within a stipulated time frame.

JEF is also carrying out ‘soft advocacy’ by raising awareness among its members about issues related to extended family, maternity, paternity, and adoption leave. This is a contentious issue as many companies, particularly smaller ones, complain about having to provide so much leave, contending that it is not affordable or feasible, especially as only a few larger companies have introduced those extended leaves.

One of the key success factors in JEF's advocacy efforts is having a very robust social dialogue and advocacy approach aligned with best practices and sound principles. One of its key strengths is that it has very strong brand recognition and trust, stemming from long-standing efforts to build constructive dialogues with various stakeholders. It also has the ability to gather diverse stakeholders to reflect on and discuss difficult issues with a focus on finding solutions and resolutions.

Going forward, JEF aims to use digital channels to further increase its outreach. It aims to launch advocacy campaigns focusing on having more women on boards and on pay equity in workplace policies, using as evidence a national, cross-industry gender pay gap survey that it launched in 2024 with a focus on young women and men.

Aiming for advocacy for systemic change

As part of the **Business Coalition for Women in Papua New Guinea's** efforts in advocacy, making use of evidence-based research is a key anchor. For example, the coalition has many donor-funded pieces of research on family and sexual violence, women in leadership, the labour market, and respectful work, among others. Going forward, the coalition aims to build its capacity to further promote advocacy to influence systemic change at national level through best practice approaches in 1) identifying key areas to advocate on, 2) ways to do policy advocacy, 3) approaches to develop a communication plan for advocacy.

Multi-stakeholder advocacy

Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) aims to influence national legislation and policy by engaging its members in developing and advocating policy positions alongside other relevant stakeholders. For example, in 2014, during the drafting of the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill, BUSA led the business delegation with representation from the Business Women's Association of South Africa and the Black Women's Organisation of South Africa. The Bill proposed a requirement that 50% of decision-making positions in companies and the public sector be held by women.⁴⁴

Evidence-based, action-oriented gender advocacy

Other evidence-based advocacy efforts to highlight are those of the **National Chamber of Commerce and Services of Uruguay (CNCSU)** which partnered in 2020 with the Organisation of Women Entrepreneurs of Uruguay (OMEU) to together promote greater gender equity in business. Through this partnership, several research and advocacy interventions were carried out. These included the National Assessment of Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) which drew up a full profile of Uruguayan female entrepreneurs as well as highlighting barriers to women's participation in the management of companies and business organisations, the challenges facing women entrepreneurs, and the needs for resources and business development services for women-founded/led companies.

(44) International Labour Organization (ILO), *Promoting Women in Business and Management: A Handbook for National Employers' Organizations*

This resulted in the development of a joint action plan between CNCSU and OMEU with a set of recommendations presented to the authorities of the Legislative Power and the Vice Presidency of the Republic. CNCSU and OMEU aimed to create space for dialogue, advocate for and implement necessary actions and to create and disseminate the tools needed to promote gender equality in business spheres.⁴⁵

Advocacy through knowledge sharing and building the business case for gender. Another example of gender-focused advocacy is that of the **Confederation of British Industry (CBI)**. It advocates for women’s leadership with two audiences in mind, the public and politicians, through sharing best practices, building the business case for gender diversity and providing leadership training for a diverse pool of senior executives, notably women.

This entails:

- 1) Issuing a booklet developed by and for businesses titled “Competitive advantage: Attracting and retaining diverse talent” with practical ideas on how companies can promote gender diversity.
- 2) Publishing a guide, *Diversity in the Boardroom*, jointly with the Government Equalities Office for business and board-ready candidates.
- 3) Publishing yearly gender and ethnicity pay gap reports.⁴⁶
- 4) Playing a convening role in sharing good practices on work and family issues and advocating for legislation to provide parental leave and reduce the cost of childcare to improve work-life balance while retaining talent. Unfortunately, although the UK has legislation on shared parental leave, the uptake of men is low. Companies, therefore, need to encourage more men to take parental leave and, in turn, contribute to a cultural shift in society and business to ensure work-life balance and career progression for women and men, including through flexible working conditions. The CBI also engages with the government in exploring ways to introduce incentives for companies to reduce the gender pay gap.⁴⁷



(45) *Women’s Empowerment: a driving force for economic recovery and beyond*, International Organisation of Employers (IOE), March 2022

(46) <https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/rw0nznngm/gender-and-ethnicity-pay-gap-report-2023.pdf>

(47) *Women’s Empowerment: a driving force for economic recovery and beyond*, International Organisation of Employers (IOE), March 2022

7. CHALLENGES FACED IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Limited capacities and awareness on gender

In the pursuit of promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment, CCIs and BMOs face numerous challenges, including limited internal capacities as well as limited awareness of among their own staff and members on gender equality.

The level of gender-related capacities varies depending on the development level of the CCI/BMO. It ranges from the need to build awareness about basic concepts and the business case for gender, to more advanced themes, such as the best ways to promote advocacy for system-level change, and how to provide tailored gender-related tools to different members according to their size, sector, gender-related development level, and so on.

Some CCIs/BMOs note the need for awareness-raising initiatives that “speak the language” of the private sector instead of the language of development practitioners or NGOs, and that resonate with their interests. For example, instead of putting the emphasis on having more women leaders, the focus can be shifted on how gender diversity enhances employee engagement and productivity.

Others note that awareness-raising about gender equality, among both the staff of CCIs/BMOs as well as their members, should target all profiles, in particular, decision-makers, who can influence gender-related efforts.

Limited buy-in, hence the lack of resources made available for gender

“As a CCI, we have limited awareness on how to offer gender lens services i.e. how to service women and men entrepreneurs based on their needs.”

Interviewee

The limited buy-in for gender – notably at leadership level – is yet another barrier. Another related challenge is the lack of financial and human resources for gender – both within CCIs/BMOs and their members. This issue is more acute for smaller CCIs/BMOs which have even more limited resources compared with larger institutions, or those that have been fortunate to receive substantial donor support. Such limited resourcing often leads to gender efforts being persistently deprioritised. This may be attributed to gender bias as well as to the lack of evidence-based business cases for mainstreaming gender within CCIs/BMOs and their members.

The issue of limited resources notably extends to research on gender (which is crucial for building the business case for gender – leading to a vicious cycle) leading to many CCIs/BMOs being forced to depend on donor funding notably for gender-related research/other activities.

Lack of an intentional, systemic gender focus

With limited buy-in and capacities to promote gender, CCIs/BMOs often have a limited intentional, systemic focus on gender. This means they don't have strategic priorities that focus on gender or concrete, effective measures to promote gender in their human resources policies or in support to their members. This is demonstrated in the lack of formalised commitments and dedicated structures for gender, including having a gender policy or strategy, or a gender focal point. Worse, they may have gender-blind organisational strategies, gender-blind or gender-discriminatory policies and practices (such as bias in recruitment) in addition to having male-dominated corporate cultures.

“ It is a challenge to find a way to make all different member profiles have a place and offer services tailored to their needs in different sectors. ”

Interviewee

For CCIs/BMOs that have at least some gender-related commitments, they may also struggle in translating their commitments into practical, concrete actions. For example, they may find it difficult to promote gender in specific sectors due to limited capacity, or to properly deliver gender equality through a project beyond simply achieving a target percentage of women involved, for example.

“ Discussions with women members highlighted the need to have a dedicated desk (versus disbursed in different department and versus the generic, offered services. ”

Interviewee

This can also be demonstrated in the lack of gender-responsive member services that are tailored to the needs, challenges and experiences of women and men entrepreneurs.

The lack of gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation systems (such as sex-disaggregated data) is also widespread among CCIs/BMOs, which may be expected considering the lack of evidence-based business case for gender that justifies a systemic gender focus and any investments to track gendered progress accordingly.

Gender diversity-related challenges

Another challenge is women's limited representation in decision-making positions (including in CCIs/BMOs themselves, member organisations, sector-related bodies, government departments, etc.), as well as there being few male allies for gender equality. This continues to limit their ability to represent gendered interests and inhibits gender mainstreaming efforts overall.⁴⁸

The limited representation of women, and male allies, in public-private dialogue processes and advocacy efforts (the phenomenon of “men only panel discussions”) is another barrier to advancing gender-sensitive economic policies.⁴⁹ This affects CCIs/BMOs across the board including the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) which noted struggling with being able to create gender balanced events and meetings, particularly at the CEO/executive level where women's representation tends to be lower.⁵⁰ The CBI has tried to remedy this by sending more invitations to women CEOs in addition to ensuring that the timing of the event and the language of the invitations are not deterring women from participating.⁵¹

“ Resistance of stakeholders to participate in meetings with women entrepreneurs, noting that gender mainstreaming is externally imposed and is not rooted in the society. Gender stereotypes persist that women should be home and should work for the family. ”

Interviewee

(48) Investment Climate Reform (ICR). ICR4WEE Conference Report. 2024

(49) Ibid

(50) International Labour Organization (ILO), *Promoting Women in Business and Management: A Handbook for National Employers' Organizations*

(51) Ibid

It is worth noting that barriers to women attaining leadership positions is multi-faceted. It could be explained by institutional policies, systems, culture and practices which are not conducive for encouraging women leaders (for example, CCIs/BMOs having a men’s club culture or requiring that a member be a CEO of an important enterprise⁵²). Society’s (including women’s) perceptions of their own role and capacities⁵³ has an impact, and so do challenges in maintaining work-life balance for women, considering the unequal distribution of care work.

“ Even in recruitment in companies, if the candidate is a woman (especially at productive age), the focus would be on whether she will be absent due to maternity or unpaid care work or will focus on the job and on profitability. ”

Interviewee

Contextual challenges include discriminatory socio-cultural norms and practices which seep into the culture of organisations, including CCIs/BMOs and their members. These are often the root cause of gendered barriers and addressing these is key to enacting systemic changes. They include gender biases, stereotypes, gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace. These norms and practices translate into organisational inertia on gender caused by resistance/reluctance to focus on gender as an “issue that is imposed from abroad, which is not locally rooted”, as one interviewee noted.

“ Perceptions of male counterparts who do not believe that women should rise to the top is a major barrier. This is due to the patriarchal system. ”

Interviewee

Other barriers relate to the fragmented regulatory and policy framework for gender, lack of adequate support, resources and coordination efforts from the public sector on gender issues (including but not limited to the mandatory quotas for women on company boards).⁵⁴

The limited availability of in-depth, reliable, updated (qualitative and quantitative) gender data, statistics, and research on gender issues, including at sector, local/national/regional and community levels is also a

problem. This impedes the ability to assess gendered barriers and opportunities, identify necessary actions and inform policies and decision-making processes. It also makes it difficult to establish an evidence-based business case for promoting gender equality. Additionally, a lack of data limits accountability for making positive changes as well as limiting the ability to document and track progress in implementation of women’s economic empowerment.⁵⁵ The limited availability of robust networks of female business leaders is yet another challenge.⁵⁶

“ In promoting women leaders, we are faced with many men, but the CCI/BMO leadership buy-in made the difference whereby he opened doors and encouraged women to apply for leadership positions. ”

Interviewee

(52) Ibid

(53) Ibid

(54) International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Bureau for Employers’ Activities (ACT/EMP), Women’s Economic Empowerment, Good practices, 9 March 2018

(55) Investment Climate Reform (ICR). ICR4WEE Conference Report. 2024

(56) Ibid

“Facing resistance and efforts to dilute and gaslight gender issues. For example, because of our efforts to promote extended maternity leaves, we were labelled as “anti-work”.”

Interviewee

“Women constitute 60% of managers but CEOs/boards are dominated by men. The glass ceiling is higher/elevated but persists. In 2023, government has introduced a quota/percentage of women on board for public boards, but the private sector has not followed suit.”

Interviewee

“Gender bias in relation to women professionals, notably those who are mothers, whereby they are often perceived as not devoted enough, hence are passed in promotions. Women are often put in a position to choose between being a professional and being a mother. Women – notably mothers – are also often seen as not being fit for leadership position.”

Interviewee



8. RECOMMENDATIONS, TOOLS AND SUPPORT

Following are recommendations to further promote gender within CCIs/BMOs, in their support to their members, and in public-private dialogues.

Adopting a systemic approach is key

Gender mainstreaming needs to be pursued through an ecosystem approach, which means that CCIs/BMOs should collaborate with private sector companies, governments, civil society and others.

For CCIs/BMOs to promote gender mainstreaming systematically within their own organisations, an intentional focus is needed. This should be implemented through an intersectional lens which considers the different experiences, challenges and needs of different segments of women and men as entrepreneurs, employers and beyond.

Ideally, this should start with an **analysis of where the organisation is in terms of mainstreaming gender**, and an examination of the gender issues the CCI/BMO can address institutionally, through its work with members and PPDs, and with relevant recommendations. Such a stocktaking exercise would then highlight the key gender-related themes on which the CCI/BMO should strategically focus, incorporating them within its mandate and strategic priorities. Such an integrated approach, if adequately resourced financially and with the necessary expertise, would maximise the CCI/BMO's impact internally as well as through its member support and through public-private dialogues.

Promoting gender diversity at leadership and board level tends to have the most impact from a human resources point of view. That said, promoting an inclusive culture – which is a very complex process – is also vital. For gender diversity to happen at leadership and board level, as well as in other positions, it is key to develop a diverse talent pipeline. These people need to be intentionally supported and developed throughout their professional life cycle. As there is no magic formula, to achieve this requires concerted, long-term efforts, policies, systems and practices which are championed by leadership as well as taking both a bottom-up and top-down approach.⁵⁷ No one size fits all solution works, so an approach that is relevant to the context and the organisation must be pursued.

CCIs/BMOs that make progress with gender mainstreaming can then lead by example, and inspire and influence their members in their own gender journeys. Furthermore, CCIs/BMOs' own internal work should be complemented by **intentional efforts to systematically mainstream gender in the services they provide to their members and through public-private dialogues**. These efforts should be informed by a gendered analysis of the context and target sectors as well as of profiles and needs of their members.

Beyond the role of CCIs/BMOs, gender-responsive public policies and incentive mechanisms for the private sector to promote gender mainstreaming are fundamental and can trigger efforts within public and private organisations. This includes gender-inclusive labour market policies, such as promoting gender-inclusive recruitment, equal pay and parental leave as well as addressing workplace harassment, alongside relevant training. At the same time, social policies and dialogues can be transformative, for example, addressing the issue of unpaid care work and its unequal distribution or gender based violence in public spaces (impact

(57) *American Chamber of Commerce in France and BIAC, 2012. Putting All Our Minds to Work Harnessing the Gender Dividend - The Business Case*

women on their way to work or as entrepreneurs) or ones promoting social protection mechanisms for women entrepreneurs. Government leadership and championship – for women’s economic empowerment – at the highest level has a huge influence in pushing this agenda forward. Importantly, the transformation of discriminatory gender norms requires long-term, concerted efforts of a wide range of stakeholders at different levels – including at institutional, organizational, community, household and individual levels – an endeavour that requires time, intentionality, and adequate resources.

Recommendations for CCIs/BMOs

CROSS-CUTTING

- **Pursue an intentional, comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality** (institutionally, with members and in PPDs). Core gender-related issues should be identified through a gender assessment to assess where the CCI/BMO is in its gender journey along with identifying areas of strengths and areas to develop. Based on this assessment, the CCI/BMO’s organisational strategy should be adapted to identify key gender-related priorities – possibly in the form of a gender strategy and action plan – that are in line with the organisation’s strategic objectives. To implement the gender strategy and action plan, the CCI/BMO should establish gender-responsive systems through a phased and iterative approach (ie implement, reflect, adjust/improve, continue). This will include gender-responsive policies, processes, culture, structures and practices supported with adequate gender expertise and resources. Themes will include gender-responsive human resources management, gender-responsive communication and gender-responsive procurement, among others. Gender-responsive human resources management includes efforts to promote pay equity, work-life balance,⁵⁸ flexible work arrangements,⁵⁹ inclusive recruitment, promoting gender diversity (notably at executive/board levels), promoting male allyship, and addressing harassment,. Advancing on those will allow CCIs/BMOs to lead by example, inspire and influence their members. Such efforts must be fully endorsed by management and should be followed by phased efforts to promote gender equality with members, and in public-private dialogues. Instilling a reflective mindset and monitoring and evaluating progress is key assess, track and steer progress.
- **Manage change.** Managing change that is associated with promoting gender equality is a key theme to advance on. This involves establishing the case and lowering the barriers for change and anticipating and managing potential resistance with relevant evidence. Such change needs to happen at individual level (for example, by raising staff members’ awareness about the importance of gender equality) and at the organisational level (for example, by having gender-responsive policies and practices). This is about addressing systemic barriers, changing mindsets and promoting a level playing field and inclusive culture. It includes a shift from considering gender equality as being a women’s issue or a win for women and a loss for men to being a human right and a business imperative which can help with harnessing, attracting and retaining a diverse talent pool, promoting employee engagement, contributing to the bottom line, increasing productivity and improving decision-making processes, etc. The allyship of men throughout this process is key.

(58) For inspiration, refer to *Business New Zealand publication on Balance Work and Life*, 2007

(59) For inspiration, refer to *Managing in a Flexible Work Environment, White Paper, Australian Institute of Management (AIM)*, November 2012

- **Build the business case.** It is necessary to develop an evidence-based business case for gender equality. In the short-term there might be a limited availability of gender-related statistics, but in the longer-term these should be developed. This must be carried out by introducing new discourses, as necessary, that are anchored in the local context rather than being drawn from Western discourses, with examples of women role models and men gender equality pioneers.
- **Monitor gendered impact.** Establish gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation systems, including but not limited to sex-disaggregated data, on staff and members (including on women-led organisations⁶⁰). This will enable CCIs/BMOs to track, assess and steer their progress and performance. Monitoring and evaluation provides an opportunity to assess the performance of ongoing efforts as well as to celebrate and document successful (and less successful) initiatives. It helps to learn from valuable experiences and enables them to be shared within the organisation and with members. It is also extremely helpful in establishing the business case for gender equality and its impact on business outcomes. It enables CCIs/BMOs to continuously assess and understand the profiles, needs and experiences of their members as a basis for providing gender-responsive, tailored services.

INTERNALLY

- **Establish conducive institutional structures while ensuring buy-in, notably at leadership level.** Having institutional structures that are dedicated to gender equality – with sufficient gender proficiency, appropriate accountability, and endorsement by leadership – is key to promoting and advocating for this agenda while ensuring progress and gaining adequate resources. This would ideally be in the form of a cross-departmental committee which would lead efforts through a participatory and consultative process. Such a committee may be spearheaded by a champion who may steer the process, liaise with relevant stakeholders, follow up on key decisions and actions, ensure the allocation of sufficient resources, regularly communicate with leadership on progress and challenges, and consistently communicate across the organisation. Alternatively, CCIs/BMOs could opt for simply having a member of staff take the role of gender focal point (without a committee) who has solid gender competencies, is committed to and passionate about promoting gender equality, and who is a good communicator with excellent interpersonal skills. This gender focal point must have the demonstrated commitment of leadership along with an accountability system that puts the responsibility for gender equality at all levels, notably leadership.
- **Have a clear vision for change.** There needs to be a clear roadmap for change over time, which outlines the key actions to be pursued over the short, medium and long term, along with ways to measure progress (and failures). There must be monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms – fed by gender KPIs and metrics – to measure and report on progress, and these should inform decision-making processes. Holding leadership at all levels accountable for results is key. Introducing recognition systems for achievers and pioneers would be a much-needed demonstration of the business case for gender mainstreaming and would serve as an inspiration to others.

AMONG MEMBERS

- **Transform member services to being gender-sensitive.** It is key to assess the needs of different types of members. This entails gathering gender data about members, and carrying out regular consultations with members on their needs and experiences. This is the basis for designing tailored gender-responsive services for different segments of the membership base. These include offering services such as:

⁽⁶⁰⁾ The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). *Women in Business: How employer and business membership organizations drive gender equality*

- Gender-responsive training and awareness-raising on gender themes.
- Peer-to-peer learning and knowledge-sharing events on gender themes (including business case for gender, practical tools and best practice approaches in promoting gender within the private sector)
- Certification programmes on gender-related themes (for example, recognising gender-inclusive places to work, gender-based-violence-free workplaces, etc.)
- Business development, leadership and entrepreneurship training and mentoring for women entrepreneurs. This includes collaborating with and supporting women entrepreneurs and women’s associations to build their capacities and advocacy relating to the barriers that women entrepreneurs face, such as access to finance, including with financial service providers, regulators, etc. It is also key to address structural obstacles (such as requiring that a member be the CEO of a prominent enterprise) that may pose a barrier for different segments of women and men.^{61/62}

IN PPDs

■ **Master advocacy with a gender lens.** It is key to diversify and broaden advocacy efforts to encompass less addressed themes. The focus of advocacy should be locally anchored, based on an analysis of the local context and the challenges that members face. This may include advocacy for improved, affordable social infrastructure (such as childcare and care for elders), gender-responsive financial services, to encourage more girls and women to pursue studies and careers in science, technology, and engineering (STEM),⁶³ etc. For additional information and inspiration, refer to the Gender-Sensitive Public-Private Dialogue Checklist on page 93 in the [Investment Climate Reform Toolbox – Tools for Reforming the Business Environment](#).

Recommendations for development partners, governments and other stakeholders

Development partners can play a key role in promoting gender mainstreaming efforts within CCIs/BMOs, in supporting their members and in public-private dialogues. This can be done through:

■ **Fostering capacities to promote gender equality among CCIs/BMOs and their members.** CCIs/BMOs need training, mentoring, and providing with practical tools to mainstream gender within their own organisations, in their support to members and in public-private dialogues. They need to know how to build the business case for gender equality (and how to put it into the language of the private sector), how to conduct gender assessments, guidance on developing a gender strategy/policy, how to conduct gender-related advocacy and public-private dialogues. They need toolkits on gender-responsive human resources management, promoting gender equality in male-dominated industries, and in offering gendered services to members. Women leaders need training and mentoring. It is key to support CCIs/BMOs to establish gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation systems as a basis for assessing, tracking and steering their gendered efforts and performance.

(61) International Labour Organization (ILO), *Promoting Women in Business and Management: A Handbook for National Employers’ Organizations*

(62) The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). *Women in Business: How employer and business membership organizations drive gender equality*

(63) *Ibid*

- **Sponsoring knowledge exchange.** Offering platforms to exchange knowledge on approaches, successes, best practices and challenges (and failures) in promoting gender would be an asset for many CCIs/BMOs.
- **Offering tailored support.** It is key to provide tailored support to CCIs/BMOs according to their needs and their stage of development. For example, for nascent CCIs/BMOs, capacity-building on basic gender concepts and developing a gender strategy/policy may be needed, whereas, for more advanced CCIs/BMOs, more advanced and specific support would be more relevant. It is important to conduct an initial assessment of where the CCI/BMO is on its gender journey to identify the type of support which can be provided through a phased approach over the short, medium and long term.⁶⁴

For governments and other stakeholders (such as NGOs and development partners), it is key to:

- 1) **Foster and advocate for gender-responsive policies and regulations** including at national and sector levels.⁶⁵ To achieve this, it is key to conduct a gendered analysis (including of gendered socio-economic norms) of how existing and new policies/strategies may affect different segments of women and men differently as a basis for informing the design, development, implementation and monitoring of those policies/strategies. Part of that is establishing and advocating for the business case for gender through evidence including, for example, a quantification of the cost of inequalities and of what gender equality would mean for all (including for the private sector, for men, for communities, etc.),
- 2) **Assess the public procurement system** to assess barriers for women entrepreneurs and identify solutions and recommendations in this regard.⁶⁶
- 3) **Promote and advocate for women's leadership** and full participation in decision-making positions at national, regional, local, sector-level, within the private sector, and in public-private dialogues.
- 4) **Support and advocate for gender-responsive data, statistics, monitoring and evaluation** to track and steer gender-related progress, challenges and actions/recommendations. It is key to engage policy makers on the importance of gender data as a basis for informing gender-responsive policies, strategies and programmes.⁶⁷
- 5) **Promote policies to support women entrepreneurs** notably through addressing the causes of the barriers they face. This includes, but is not limited to, providing tailored financial services (including loans, insurance and savings) to meet the needs of women entrepreneurs while incorporating alternative collateral requirements as well as promoting reliable and affordable social infrastructure (such as childcare and care for elders). It also entails promoting simplified formalisation systems to make them accessible for women entrepreneurs as well as addressing discriminatory norms, stereotypes and beliefs about women's role in the workplace and as entrepreneurs.⁶⁸

Across stakeholders, it is key to advocate and support women leaders⁶⁹ through:

- 1) **Supporting institutional structures, policies and systems** (including ensuring gender-responsive recruitment, a conducive organisational culture, gender diversity at executive/board levels, promoting work-life balance and flexible work arrangements),
- 2) **Publicising women leaders** (including at board/executive level) as role models for others and awareness-raising about their successes,

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Ibid

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility. ICR4WEE Conference Report. 2024

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Ibid

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Ibid

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Investment Climate Reform (ICR). ICR4WEE Conference Report. 2024.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Promoting Women in Business and Management: A Handbook for National Employers' Organizations*

- 3) **Supporting, mentoring and sponsoring emerging women leaders** particularly in traditionally male-dominated roles or domains; this includes building women leaders' capacities including in technical and soft skills (such as communication, leadership and negotiation),
- 4) **Advocacy for women and girls to pursue studies and careers** in science, technology, and engineering (STEM) and other traditionally male-dominated domains to address the shortage of women's talent in those specialised fields.⁷⁰

Necessary tools and support

When it comes to the tools necessary to mainstream gender, CCIs/BMOs noted needing practical guidelines and checklists on themes such as

- 1) **Gender-responsive policies**, including gender-responsive recruitment, work-life balance, flexible work arrangements, performance management, addressing sexual harassment, promoting women leaders, positive masculinity and male allyship, and gender-responsive budgeting,
- 2) **The business case for gender equality**, including how it contributes to business results/outcomes (including productivity),
- 3) **Assessment checklists** on mainstreaming gender, gaps and ways to prioritise areas to work on (in the short, medium, and long term),
- 4) **Best practices in gender advocacy**, notably focusing on systemic change,
- 5) **Approaches to integrate gender** in CCIs/BMOs' services,
- 6) **On the production and analysis of gendered data** (including but not limited to sex disaggregated data),
- 7) **Conducting a gendered analysis** of interventions,
- 8) **Best practice approaches to designing and implementing gender policies**; such tools must be easy to digest for companies (e.g. simple, short) and, if needed, linked to other, more elaborate tools for a deeper dive.

Other than tools, **CCIs/BMOs highlighted the need for the following support** to help them further integrate gender:

- 1) **A country-level or sector-level analysis of gender issues** – including in legislations and workplace practices/policies such as work-life balance – with the aim of assessing current efforts, identifying gendered barriers, workable solutions and recommendations (in general and for specific sectors),
- 2) **Training and other capacity-building activities for CCIs/BMOs staff** – at different levels – and for their members,
- 3) **Opportunities to exchange knowledge with other CCIs/BMOs** about their experiences, best practice examples, lessons learned, success factors and challenges in promoting gender equality institutionally, with members, and in public-private dialogues.

(69) International Labour Organization (ILO), *Promoting Women in Business and Management: A Handbook for National Employers' Organizations*

(70) The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE). *Women in business: How employer and business membership organizations drive gender equality*

ANNEX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Region	Country	Name of requester institution	Contact person in organisation
Africa	Benin	Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie du Bénin (CIC Bénin)	Cellia Amoussougbo, Gender Specialist Job Biao, Digital Communication Manager
Africa	Côte d'Ivoire	Confederation Generale des Entreprises de Côte D'Ivoire (Cgeci)	Anastasie Kadja, Head of the Entrepreneurship Division Aïssatou Cisse Seye, President of the National Entrepreneurship Promotion Commission
Africa	DR Congo	Fédération des Entreprises du Congo (FEC)	Anita Mutima, First vice president at the commission of women entrepreneurs
Africa	Ethiopia	Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations (AACCSA)	Daniel Dendir, Manager, Research and Project Management Department
Africa	Mauritius	Cap Business Océan Indien	Salimah Jaulim, Gender Focal Point
Africa	Senegal	UNACOIS Jappo	Ousmane Sy Ndiaye, Executive Secretary
Africa	Uganda	Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE)	Grace Nabakooza, Head Employment Relations & Legal
Caribbean	Jamaica	Jamaica Employers' Federation (JEF)	O'neil Grant, Chief Executive Officer
Caribbean	Antigua and Barbuda	Antigua and Barbuda Employer's Federation	J. Arlene Henry, Executive Secretary
Pacific	Papua New Guinea	PNG Business Coalition for Women	Evonne Kennedy, Executive Director
Other	Other	International Organisation of Employers (IOE)	Akustina Morni, Director of Policy Thannaletchimy Chimy (Ex-IOE), Research Manager, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)

IMPRINT

The ICR Facility supported the production of this publication. It is co-funded by the European Union (EU), the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the British Council. The ICR Facility is implemented by GIZ, the British Council, Expertise France, and SNV. The contents of the publication are the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU, OACPS, BMZ or the implementing partners.

The ICR Facility supports countries and regional institutions of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) in their public-private dialogue process to create a more conducive and sustainable investment climate.

PUBLISHER:

ICR Facility
Rue du Trône 108, 1050 Brussels, Belgium
www.icr-facility.eu

URL LINKS:

Responsibility for the content of external websites linked in this publication always lies with their respective publishers.

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Brussels, June 2025

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