



WOW // Work and
Opportunities
for Women


Women workers in global value chains

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Increasing global evidence on women workers in global value chains

Global value chains depend on hundreds of millions of workers for sourcing from developing countries.¹ Women represent a significant proportion of workers in many sectors, including agri-food, garments and personal care. At present, there is very limited data and information on the number of women workers and roles they play. Research, as part of the Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) programme, aims to increase global evidence on women workers in global value chains.

Leading international companies are now promoting gender equality within their supply base.² An example is M&S Plan A, which aims for their Food, Clothing and Home first tier suppliers to have 25% women in management positions by 2022.³

Gender equality is a key component of business human rights strategies, building supply chain resilience, and commercial success. Promoting the economic empowerment of women enhances communities and sustainable development. Companies need better gender data and information to track achievement of their goals.

This document provides an overview of WOW research. It is the first of a planned series of Research Briefings that will be produced at different stages during the WOW programme.

Women Workers in Global Value Chains

WOW is an ambitious programme that aims to enhance the economic empowerment of women workers in global value chains. It will facilitate greater collaboration across the private sector, civil society, governments, research institutions and international organisations to increase evidence on women workers. WOW research will strive to achieve this through:

- **Research:** to shed light on the number and roles of women involved in global production focusing on agrifood, garments and personal care value chains.
- **Research Guidelines:** to inform companies, social compliance bodies, consultants and researchers on how to capture, record and report gender-disaggregated data and information more effectively.
- **Clarification of definitions and core questions:** refining definitions relating to gender equality and women's economic empowerment applied in global value chains and advocating consensus between key players on an agreed set of simple core questions to generate more comparable data and information in global value chains.
- **Collaboration:** seeking collaboration through WOW business partnerships and engagement with practitioners and researchers to promote more coherent evidence gathering and reporting that leverages economic empowerment of women workers within global value chains and related programmes.

¹ The ILO estimates that for 40 OECD countries and the BRIC (Brazil, Russian, India and China) bloc, GVCs generate approximately 453 million jobs (42% women), equating to 20.6% of total employment. This does not include workers in low-income developing countries or lower tiers of value chains. ILO. (2015). *World Employment and Social Outlook 2015*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

² Scott, L. (2017) Private Sector Engagement with Women's Economic Empowerment: Lessons learned from years of practice, Saïd Business School, Oxford.

³ <https://corporate.marksandspencer.com/plan-a>

What we know

Global value chains play a key role in global production and trade.⁴ They are an important source of paid work for women in many developing countries. Currently data and information on women working in value chains gathered by companies, researchers and policy makers is inconsistent, fragmented and partial. Whilst this applies to upper tiers of value chains, at lower tiers women workers are often invisible. International organisations are only beginning to collect data on workers linked to global value chains across sectors and countries.⁵

Accessing paid work can provide women with greater economic independence. But they also face many challenges. These include lack of equal opportunities, discrimination, gender pay gap, poor support for child care, and often sexual harassment and abuse.⁶ Company initiatives are beginning to address gender issues. It is not possible to assess progress for women workers if there is no consistent measure of change. Better evidence and information will enhance transparency on the position and role of women workers across global value chains.

What we need to know

WOW research aims to enhance global evidence on women's work across value chains by improving the collection, recording and reporting of gender-disaggregated data and information. This will enable tracking of change over time, and better assessment of the outcomes of initiatives to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment in global value chains. Research will be undertaken at three levels:

- **Value Chain Mapping:** How many women are in what types of paid work in global value chains across sectors and countries? Answering this is a challenge given national and industry statistics often fail to distinguish work in value chains. Gender mapping of value chains by sector will focus on agrifood, garments and personal care. This will provide an overview of the gender profile across different value chain tiers and sourcing countries.
- **Company Level:** Tracing commercial linkages between multinationals and lead firms to their suppliers, as well as estimated numbers of male and female workers in different categories of work (including informal and smallholder). Assessing terms and conditions of work associated for different groups. Undertaking selected studies in agri-food garments, personal care sourcing countries.
- **Worker Level:** Assessing the challenges and opportunities women face in value chains situated in selected supplier and country contexts. What are the specific gender barriers women face and what are the opportunities for upgrading to work that is more economically and socially empowering?

⁴ It is estimated that up to 80% of world trade now passes through global value chains, coordinated by lead firms and multi-national companies. See UNCTAD (2013). *World Investment Report – Global Value Chains: Investment and Trade for Development*.

⁵ [Footnote to be inserted on OECD TiVA jobs portal (forthcoming)]

⁶ See Christian, M. Evers, B. and Barrientos, S. (2013) Women in Value Chains: Making a difference. Capturing the Gains Briefing, University of Manchester. Available at <http://www.capturingthegains.org/summit/briefings/>.

How do we find out?

WOW will work with companies, industry bodies, civil society, policy makers and researchers. All are involved in collecting data and information in one form or another. Currently this data is disjointed and fragmented. One objective of WOW research is to provide guidance to companies on how information could be gathered in ways that are more comparable, cost-effective and easily scaled up. There are three key sources that can contribute to providing better data and information:

Social compliance: Companies collect a significant amount of data and information from social audits and certification of labels. However, social compliance is often gender blind.⁷ It is better at assessing standards with documentary evidence such as wages, health and safety rather than more sensitive issues such as sexual harassment. Social compliance has the potential to provide an important channel for capturing gender-disaggregated data and information if it becomes more gender sensitive. Data acquired in audit visits, audit reports and recording of information needs to be improved. This would be a cost-effective source of information available to companies.

Monitoring and evaluation: Company and donor funded value chain projects in developing countries often require monitoring and evaluation (M&E) or impact assessments.⁸ These can also provide a source of gender-disaggregated data, especially where gender is a programme objective.⁹ It is informed by gender value chain toolkits developed by a number of organisations.¹⁰ M&E provides an important source of data and information on women.¹¹ Resources required for M&E systems vary by project and design, but enhancing their gender sensitivity would involve minimal extra cost.

Research: Research based on case studies provides a source of in-depth data and information on women workers in global value chains. It can provide insights into sensitive issues such as sexual harassment and verbal abuse. Many studies provide information on the impact of waged work in global production on women's economic empowerment.¹² However, analysis of value chain linkages is often limited. Only some studies focus specifically on gender and global value chains.¹³ Research can shine a light on areas where women's work remains largely hidden, including homeworkers and contributing family labour in small-scale agriculture. It provides scope for examining the socio-economic context shaping gender barriers and opportunities for women workers. However, research is resource and time intensive, and case studies only provide insights into specific locations and issues.

⁷ BSR (2018 forthcoming) '*Gender Sensitive Social Auditing*'; and BSR (2017) Gender Equality in Codes of Conduct Guidance, available at <https://www.bsr.org/our-insights/report-view/gender-equality-in-codes-of-conduct-guidance>.

⁸ For a review of 30 donor funded value chain interventions see: Humphrey, J. and Navas-Aleman, L. (2010) Value Chains, Donor Interventions and Poverty Reduction: A review of donor practice, IDS Research Report No. 63, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

⁹ See for example: Better Work (2016) Progress and Potential: How Better Work is improving garment workers' lives and boosting factory competitiveness, <https://betterwork.org/blog/portfolio/impact-assessment/>

¹⁰ For example: Mayoux, L. and Mackie, G. (2007) Making the Strongest Linkages: A Practical guide to mainstreaming gender analysis in value chain development, International Labour Organization, Geneva. Lavern, A. and Pyburn, R. (2012) Changing Chains to Change: Gender Equity in Value Chain Development, Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), Amsterdam.

¹¹ Scott, L. (2016), Advisory Notes on Measures: Women's Economic Empowerment, Said Business School Research Papers, Oxford.

¹² For a review of 27 studies see: Dolan, C. (2016) A systematic Review on Measuring the Impacts of Women's Waged Work in Global Industries, in L. Scott, Advisory Notes on Measures: Women's Economic Empowerment, Said Business School Research Papers, Oxford.

¹³ For example: Barrientos, S. (2014) Gender and Global Value Chains: Challenges of Economic and Social Upgrading in Agri-food, EUI Working Paper: RSCAS 2014/96, European University Institute, Florence. Staritz, C. and Reis, J.G. (2013) Global Value Chains, Economic Upgrading and Gender, International Trade Department, Gender Development Unit, The World Bank, Washington DC.

Different sources of gender disaggregated data and information from various actors can provide complementary information. Companies can provide it through social compliance; policy organisations can provide it through M&E; and academics through research. However, currently there is little commonality between approaches. Definitions vary, data and information generated remains fragmented and difficult to compare across value chains. WOW research aims to facilitate greater synergy between approaches. Better and more consistent evidence would enhance transparency on women workers in global value chains and inform strategies to promote women's economic empowerment.

WOW is an ambitious programme that aims to enhance the economic empowerment of 300,000 women working in global value chains by September 2022. We will achieve this goal by supporting businesses that are ready and willing to act on women's economic empowerment; enabling players across the value chain ecosystem to drive change; and influencing the UK and global agenda on women's economic empowerment.

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