

G-SEARCh tested tools & approaches for gender lens investing

📺 Watch Video

"The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities, and women and girls in developing countries are the most affected. This is timely research that will allow the impact investing industry to learn and share the most effective ways to integrate gender into SMEs. This will provide crucial knowledge to help scale gender lens investing in emerging markets to deliver on gender equality."

Carolina Robino

Senior Program Specialist,
International Development
Research Centre (IDRC)

Purpose

As investors with experience in gender lens investing (GLI), our peers often ask us for information on how to kickstart their GLI journey. Many useful [resources](#) are available to do this. However, this brief addresses a gap in information on the tools and approaches used to design and implement gender-smart technical assistance for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to improve their social and financial performance. We also share our reflections from our collective experience to date. This is just the beginning of our initiative, so please stay tuned!

Who we are

The Gender-Smart Enterprise Assistance Research Coalition (G-SEARCh) is a coalition of six impact investors committed to building the business case for investing with a gender lens in SMEs in emerging markets. The consortium includes AlphaMundi, Acumen, SEAF, Root Capital, AHL Venture Partners, and Shell Foundation. Each investor provides and supports gender-smart technical assistance activities across business operations to select SMEs in their portfolio.

What is Gender-Smart Technical Assistance?

Gender-smart technical assistance (TA) improves gender equity while enhancing companies' financial performance. We group this type of support into two categories: 1) Internal TA includes activities such as recruiting more women employees, refining human resource policies, and developing employee skills; 2) External TA provides practices to improve outcomes for women in the companies' external value chains, such as conducting market research to understand women customer needs better to further adapt products and services for them.

Why we are conducting research

The consortium's research partner, the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan (WDI) is measuring the effectiveness of different approaches and tools that consortium members deploy as part of the effort to build the business case and evidence base for GLI. This brief focuses on early insights gathered from this research initiative. WDI is also measuring the social and financial performance of these activities to strengthen the gains from TA. The project focuses on 30 SMEs across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These businesses work in various sectors, including microfinance and financial inclusion, sustainable food and agriculture, business services, education, and energy access and climate change mitigation.

About this brief

Here, we document the G-SEARCh investors' approaches and tools to design and implement TA. We share how we engage with participating SMEs and the resources necessary. We also capture early lessons such as factors that enable success, challenges faced, and early benefits for SMEs and their stakeholders.



alphamundi



Shell Foundation | 



Acumen: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights



INVESTOR PROFILE

Assets under management	\$187M
Asset class	Equity
Sector	Food & ag, energy, education & workforce development, healthcare, financial inclusion
2X Criteria	Entrepreneurship, Leadership, Employment, Consumption
Regions	East and West Africa, Latin America, South Asia, North America
Investees stage of growth	All ¹
Implementation partner	In-house, other external organizations

What is Acumen's commitment to gender lens investing (GLI)?

Acumen prioritizes gender equity and thus embeds gender inclusion strategies into every step of their investment cycle. Gender-smart technical assistance (TA) and associated grant-making to portfolio investees—small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that serve low-income populations—fall under Acumen's GLI strategies. These activities, along with support for sex-disaggregated data collection and impact measurement, are part of Acumen's post-investment, long-term plans to help scale portfolio companies.

How does Acumen design and implement TA?

Acumen applies region-led strategies when designing, implementing and/or supporting TA for their SMEs. TA is restricted to SMEs that have received an investment from Acumen. Regional Acumen teams develop their approach to TA based on local needs and access to funding, and also co-create TA designs with SME staff. Acumen also plans to use insights from impact measurement conducted by their Lean Data collection partner, [60 Decibels](#), and the expertise of implementing partner(s) to design and implement TA.

What are the goals of such TA?

Acumen aims to be a trailblazer in GLI and TA implementation to alleviate poverty and address its mission statement to serve impoverished communities. Other goals include increasing women's participation in the value chain to improve their economic outcomes and creating SME buy-in and technical know-how to improve and sustain gender equity across business processes. Acumen also aims to create a quantitative evidence base that includes the SME's financial performance gains and stakeholders' social outcomes from TA, to support its qualitative data collection and consequently, strengthen internal investment decision-making.

How does Acumen select SMEs for this opportunity?

Acumen selects TA recipients from their active portfolio of investments, based on the SME's current activities and willingness to improve and sustain gender equity. Acumen also reviews TA project timeliness and the SME's financial health to ensure TA is feasible.

How does Acumen begin engagements with selected SMEs?

Across regions, engagement begins with in-depth conversations between Acumen's Relationship Manager and the SME's CEO and/or founder(s), senior management, and employees to discern their understanding of gender inclusion and buy-in for TA. It also includes an open discussion on the SME's willingness to allocate resources (including funds if needed) to the TA.

In Latin America, the regional team also uses qualitative data collected through a survey administered to SMEs by [Aequales](#), a Latin American non-profit specialized in gender, to understand gaps in gender inclusion in the workplace. Next, Acumen's regional team collaborates with an implementing partner who provides in-depth TA design and implementation support to the selected SMEs.

In East and West Africa, Acumen socializes the availability of funding for TA to pique interest among portfolio SMEs. The SME co-develops a response with Acumen's Relationship Manager using a custom TA Grant Application Form. Additionally, SMEs complete the Acumen [Gender Diagnostic Tool](#) to facilitate discussion and help Acumen better understand the business model, the SME's efforts in improving gender equality, and areas for improvement. Acumen's Country Director, with input from others, selects SMEs to receive TA.

- *"Our mission is to tackle problems of poverty; we integrate gender equity considerations through our regional investment strategies so that our work takes into account gender dynamics where we operate, and can drive greater impact for women and men."*

Yasmina Zaidman

Chief Partnerships Officer, Acumen

What steps has Acumen put in place to refine its approaches over time?

Acumen's regional staff attend formal gender inclusion training workshops to become strong champions of gender equity. The workshops are facilitated by expert organizations such as

1. Companies are categorized as Stage 1 (seed), Stage 2 (early), and Stage 3 (growth). Seed stage companies tend to have a limited support team, are field-testing their business model, are pre-revenue or less than \$200K in revenue, have negative cash flows, and raise from their network. Early stage companies have a team of 10-50 personnel, have an established product/service, generate revenues between \$200K-2M, generate enough positive cash flow to service debt, and raise through their network, seed rounds, and possibly Series A. Growth stage companies have a team of 50+ personnel and are likely operating across markets, have a well-established product/service, revenues of \$2M+, EBITDA positive, and are past Series A funding.

Acumen: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights



The [Criterion Institute](#) and equip attendees with skills to tackle gender equity challenges, identify gaps and opportunities for gender inclusion in business operations, and better understand the links between gender inclusion and Acumen's mission and approach. Acumen will soon extend these workshops to SME leadership and also include questions on the TA's effectiveness and the workshops in their annual feedback survey of SME leadership, to understand how the latter perceive post-investment support. Acumen's goal is to use this data to measure changes in attitudes and perceptions of gender, strengthen the approach, and modify the TA as needed.

What resources are necessary for this engagement?

In East and West Africa, SMEs dedicate staff time to co-design the TA project, develop the TA Grant Application, engage on the Gender Diagnostic Tool, and implement TA activities. TA grants given to SMEs are typically between \$10,000 to \$50,000. Acumen encourages companies to cost-share at least 20%. Acumen raises the remaining funds, and regional staff dedicate time to support the selected SMEs through all activities.

In Latin America, Acumen contracts an implementing partner who works closely with the SME over six months. The implementing partner may choose to use the Gender Diagnostic Tool or others to design the TA. The implementing partner also helps the SME select specific metrics to monitor the TA and develops tools to measure gender equity at regular intervals to ensure continuity. Acumen fills in the gap to provide any necessary support after the implementing partner exits to ensure that successful TA interventions are institutionalized.

TOOLS USED

[Gender Diagnostic Tool](#) (See page 46)

What are key factors that facilitate the success of the approaches?

1) Resources to fund the TA, including resources to select and hire a best-fit implementing partner are essential. Acumen has raised funds through dedicated fundraising efforts, and [ALIVE](#)², sponsored by Acumen, has also reached out to existing investors to provide support. During these efforts, Acumen stresses that the funds are not just for gender-specific TA activities, but rather for impact strategies such as social impact measurement that can significantly benefit women at the workplace and in SME value chains. 2) Acumen develops a strong technical know-how and sense of ownership among its regional staff, as each region drives their own investment and TA strategy. While many investors focus on ensuring buy-in among SME leadership, Acumen also builds buy-in among its staff to design and implement TA. Acumen regional staff is empowered to co-develop their gender integration strategies, hand-in-hand with the SME given that SME staff are most aware of their challenges and the local context.

What are insights for investors starting on this journey?

1) Investor leadership may misjudge how willing and capable their investment officers are to embed gender inclusion strategies within SMEs' business operations, given the officers' multiple portfolio management responsibilities and goals. To address this, Acumen acknowledges the value of formal gender sensitization workshops that strengthen the understanding of gender as a social construct, and reinforce how gender inclusion within business operations can benefit all stakeholders. 2) There can be important differences in gender norms even within countries, for example in cases where investment officers live in central cities, but the SMEs sell their products and services or work with producers in districts and villages. Hence, Acumen notes the need to work closely with the SME staff to design and implement compelling hyper-local strategies for gender inclusion.

- *"In the Latin American region, we feel it is important in how we communicate about gender lens investing with portfolio companies but also with external parties like funders, investors, etc. We have found that having a clear regional strategy sets us up for success across stakeholders."*

Maria Pia Morante

Investment Manager, ALIVE

What are expected gains from using these approaches?

Acumen will use a mix of qualitative and quantitative efficacy data to understand the long-term social and financial impacts of these approaches. These data are collected for every active portfolio SME annually, and will strengthen the evidence base of the benefits of such TA. Acumen will use this evidence to encourage other investors to begin GLI and support such gender inclusive strategies. Furthermore, Acumen will continue to publicly share regional-specific design and implementation process lessons and best practices.

What has been an "aha" moment, so far?

It has been incredibly encouraging that even under the grey cloud of COVID-19, SMEs want to start or continue their gender inclusion efforts. There is a commitment among entrepreneurs to grow their businesses in ways that are equitable, inclusive, and responsive to the challenges of this time.

2. Acumen Latin American Impact Ventures (ALIVE) is a Latin American fund manager that supports growing, high-impact companies. In order to expand its impact and attract a broad spectrum of capital, ALIVE was structured as an autonomous, team-led fund manager, deploying funds using traditional private-type structures.

AHL Venture Partners: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights



INVESTOR PROFILE	
Assets under management	\$42M
Asset class	Debt, mezzanine, equity, funds ¹
Sector	Food & ag, financial inclusion, energy access
2X Criteria	All categories
Regions	East & Southern Africa
Investees stage of growth	Stage 2 (early), Stage 3 (growth) ²
Implementation partner	Value for Women

What is AHL Venture Partners' commitment to gender lens investing (GLI)?

While AHL Venture Partners (AHL) is not explicitly a gender lens impact investing fund, the firm considers gender inclusion and equality an important part of their impact. AHL is committed to promoting increased participation of women in the economy and society, and has integrated gender considerations throughout the firm's investment strategy and processes. AHL has moved beyond counting the number of women in leadership positions to the operationalization and mainstreaming of gender inclusion at fund- and portfolio company-levels. Much of AHL's effort is focused on embedding behavioral change in their portfolio small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and understanding the key opportunities to overcoming related challenges.

Who are AHL's key implementing partners?

AHL works with Value for Women (VfW) to carry out gender diagnostics and develop and implement tailored gender-smart technical assistance (TA) strategies for selected SMEs.

What are the goals of such TA?

These TA strategies aim at addressing social, commercial, and operational challenges identified at the SME. They aim to generate positive financial outcomes and improved empowerment of women at all levels—enterprise, customer and value chain.

How does AHL select SMEs for this opportunity?

AHL engaged with the SMEs prior to the funnel-based selection process that VfW typically uses when working with investors. In this engagement, AHL contracted VfW to conduct a gender diagnostics survey in 2019 with eight portfolio SMEs to understand gender inclusion trends and opportunities to improve investees' business performance and gender outcomes. Based on the findings, VfW developed a set of recommendations on potential

business-first, gender inclusion strategies. Next, VfW and AHL engaged with the SMEs to ascertain interest in implementing one or more of these strategies. Here, AHL made a final selection of the SMEs based on the following criteria: TA alignment with the SME's strategic and current business priorities, SME willingness and capacity (people, financial, and time) to engage in facilitating and implementing TA, and SME leadership commitment to gender advancement.

What steps took place after SME selection?

AHL presented findings from the initial gender survey that was administered in 2019 to the selected SMEs' Boards of Directors (BoD) to champion gender inclusion, build buy-in at the highest level, and gauge interest in undertaking TA.

- *"We're keen to see Gender Lens Investing moving beyond a moral imperative to a foundational pillar of good investing, much like ESG and/or Sustainable Investing. As such, our GLI TA is focused on demonstrating the business case for gender inclusion and mainstreaming. We hope that by sharing our approach and results from this work, we contribute to making GLI more accessible to mainstream investors."*

Rosanne Whalley
CEO, AHL Venture Partners

The Value for Women (VfW) approach to designing and implementing gender-smart strategies

VfW is a specialized advisory firm whose partners include impact investors and their portfolio companies, with the aim of furthering gender inclusion objectives for businesses. VfW is the gender technical service provider to the G-SEARCh consortium.

As the active implementing partner to consortium members, AHL Ventures, AlphaMundi, and Shell Foundation, VfW provides tailored gender support to SMEs by designing, piloting, and refining gender-smart strategies across business functions. Their approach includes an SME selection process, an in-depth gender and business diagnostic, and developing a menu of options for gender and business strategies that lead to concrete business practice changes. VfW then guides the SMEs during the process of implementation of selected strategies and supports them with results measurement. VfW has been championing this approach since 2015, including one of the first iterations developed in partnership with the Shell Foundation.

1. Investments made in other funds in Africa.

2. Companies are categorized as Stage 1 (seed), Stage 2 (early), and Stage 3 (growth). Seed stage companies tend to have a limited support team, are field-testing their business model, are pre-revenue or less than \$200K in revenue, have negative cash flows, and raise from their network. Early stage companies have a team of 10–50 personnel, have an established product/service, generate revenues between \$200K–2M, generate enough positive cash flow to service debt, and raise through their network, seed rounds, and possibly Series A. Growth stage companies have a team of 50+ personnel and are likely operating across markets, have a well-established product/service, revenues of \$2M+, EBITDA positive, and are past Series A funding.

AHL Venture Partners: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights



With confirmation from the BoD, AHL developed concept notes for each SME outlining the diagnostic results, proposed TA strategies (including resource requirements and cost-impact analysis), the business case, and details of the G-SEARCH initiative. AHL conducted meetings with SME leadership to walk through the concept note, prioritize strategies in line with business priorities, and set the stage for a pre-validation session with VfW. This session then informed the TA workplans, related roles and responsibilities, activities, deliverables, and anticipated budget—all of which informed the MOU between the SMEs, AHL, and VfW. Next, VfW conducted a final validation session with SME leadership to review and agree on the TA proposal and implementation steps.

What activities will take place moving forward?

VfW will pilot selected strategies and test and adjust the TA as needed based on monitoring data over a 6-8-month period. VfW will share final impact data and next steps on how strategies can be further refined and/or institutionalized with the SMEs. They will also capture and share lessons publicly in the GLI space.

What resources are necessary for this engagement?

AHL has invested resources to contract VfW. Both AHL and the SME invest financial, human, and technical resources. And, given AHL's small team, AHL hired a [strategic external project manager](#) to provide additional capacity and project oversight.

TOOLS USED

VfW undertakes a gender diagnostic process, comprising a SME-level questionnaire and key informant interviews across business areas including: Workforce, Leadership and Management; Policies and Practices; Commitment and Strategy; Customers and Clients. VfW then generates action cards with suggested strategies per SME, with 'heat maps' to represent high-medium-low opportunities for gender inclusion.

What are key factors that facilitate the success of the approach?

1) Early stage buy-in from the SME's BoD and leadership teams are critical to sustained engagement. 2) SME leadership decides which TA will be implemented from the options provided by VfW. This decision-making ensures the SME's full ownership of the strategy and related implementation plan. 3) The SME's appointment of key point persons to collaborate with VfW and manage the implementation of the TA strategies is essential to success. This also enables transfer of skills to SME staff, for continuity and ownership of strategies after VfW's exit.

What are insights for investors starting on this journey?

1) AHL recognizes the importance of strategy buy-in from the SME leadership from the outset while also setting expectations to amend strategies as needed to keep the approach relevant to the existing operating conditions and business context.

Furthermore, given that such TA is a new approach under the umbrella of GLI as well as the finding that TA designs will differ per SME, both investor and SME leadership should be prepared to pivot strategies and iterate their thinking about the TA and expected outcomes. 2) It is important to understand not only the benefits, but also the costs of GLI, mainstreaming gender, and undertaking TA. As such, AHL is capturing the cost and time commitment related to the TA strategies at both SME- and Fund-level and hopes to share these findings in the future.

- *"We often find that investors and businesses are largely sold on the "why" of gender inclusion and GLI, but face difficulties in implementing the practical "how" of where to get started and what to do. Through the process of TA engagement and with investor support, businesses are often surprised to learn about the breadth of areas across which they could improve gender inclusion, and the corresponding impacts this could have within the business. Prioritizing gender as an add-on is challenging for small and growing businesses, and so we aim to minimize any additional work and maximize success by ensuring that the TA is fully aligned with the businesses' priorities and resources."*

Sarah Mills
Portfolio Lead, VfW

What are early gains seen from using this approach?

The approach has enabled both AHL and the SME to apply a commercial and social lens to the business and develop critical skillsets. The data and insights garnered so far from applying the approach provide a wealth of information supporting AHL and the SME's investment and decision-making processes, and on women's economic empowerment in general. The process provides for a hand-holding approach to gender inclusion by VfW at the SME-level, resulting in natural leadership buy-in and operationalization.

What has been an "aha" moment, so far?

Each TA is unique due to SMEs operating in different contexts, sectors and markets. There is no boiler plate approach to design and implementation of gender-focused TA, making it challenging to ascertain upfront the full resourcing needs of the intervention from a project cost and planning perspective. Investors and portfolio companies may find this "grey area" challenging. However, that being said, it has been a delight to see how engaged the SMEs have been in the roll-out of the approach.

AlphaMundi: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights

alphamundi

INVESTOR PROFILE

Assets under management	\$60M
Asset class	Debt, mezzanine, equity
Sector	Food & ag, microfinance & fintech, energy access, climate change mitigation
2X Criteria	All categories
Regions	East Africa, Latin America
Investees stage of growth	Stage 3 (growth) ¹
Implementation partner	Value for Women

What is AlphaMundi's commitment to gender lens investing (GLI)?

AlphaMundi Group embodies the principles of gender equity with its staff comprised of 66% females and with women in a majority of senior leadership roles. AlphaMundi also applies a gender lens across its global investment portfolio and embeds gender equity principles at every step of the investment cycle from deal sourcing through exit. All companies complete a Gender Diagnostic Survey and diligence only proceeds if the company demonstrates a commitment to gender inclusion. AlphaMundi sees the decision to support gender-smart technical assistance (TA) as part of their GLI journey that goes beyond the provision of capital to female founders and companies providing products/services to women and girls. AlphaMundi aims to influence all small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to become long-term champions of gender equity, and ultimately empower the next generation of female entrepreneurs.

- *"The whole point of TA intervention is for us to take a business-first approach to gender inclusivity. Any interventions that are going to benefit the business, whether in marketing, HR, or sales, benefits us as an investor overall."*

Christine Roddy

Executive Director, AlphaMundi Foundation

Who are AlphaMundi's key implementing partners?

AlphaMundi works with Value for Women (VfW) to develop highly customized TA for SMEs.

What are the goals of such TA?

AlphaMundi seeks to embed gender-smart practices in the DNA of companies at an early stage and ultimately deliver enhanced social and financial returns to the companies, their investors, stakeholders, and beneficiaries.

How does AlphaMundi select SMEs for this opportunity?

SMEs are typically current portfolio companies of one of AlphaMundi's funds. Criteria for selection include: 1) strong financial standing, 2) demonstrated willingness and bandwidth to participate in the project, 3) projected financial and social return for the investment, and 4) fit within the portfolio of ongoing TA projects as they pertain to AlphaMundi's research.

How does AlphaMundi begin engagements with selected SMEs?

AlphaMundi begins with mini-debrief calls with the selected SME's leadership to share the opportunity for subsidized TA. AlphaMundi stresses the financial and social benefits, confirms interest and readiness, and connects the SME with VfW. Upon introduction, VfW leads conversations through a launch call with the CEO, and then corresponding emails and presentations, to build awareness and buy-in about the initiative. These early discussions focus on describing each step with resources needed to orient and educate leadership, identify and scope the potential focus areas for TA that are aligned with the SME's business and social priorities, and assign responsibilities. The SME identifies a mid- to senior-level point of contact who serves as a champion and secures CEO participation when needed. This project liaison model enables strong communication among the SME, VfW, and AlphaMundi, and ensures that SME leadership is involved at key stages.

The Value for Women (VfW) approach to designing and implementing gender-smart strategies

VfW is a specialized advisory firm whose partners include impact investors and their portfolio companies, with the aim of furthering gender inclusion objectives for businesses. VfW is the gender technical service provider to the G-SEARCH consortium.

As the active implementing partner to consortium members, AHL Ventures, AlphaMundi, and Shell Foundation, VfW provides tailored gender support to SMEs by designing, piloting, and refining gender-smart strategies across business functions. Their approach includes an SME selection process, an in-depth gender and business diagnostic, and developing a menu of options for gender and business strategies that lead to concrete business practice changes. VfW then guides the SMEs during the process of implementation of selected strategies and supports them with results measurement. VfW has been championing this approach since 2015, including one of the first iterations developed in partnership with the Shell Foundation.

1. Companies are categorized as Stage 1 (seed), Stage 2 (early), and Stage 3 (growth). Seed stage companies tend to have a limited support team, are field-testing their business model, are pre-revenue or less than \$200K in revenue, have negative cash flows, and raise from their network. Early stage companies have a team of 10-50 personnel, have an established product/service, generate revenues between \$200K-2M, generate enough positive cash flow to service debt, and raise through their network, seed rounds, and possibly Series A. Growth stage companies have a team of 50+ personnel and are likely operating across markets, have a well-established product/service, revenues of \$2M+, EBITDA positive, and are past Series A funding.

G-SEARCH tested tools & approaches for gender lens investing

AlphaMundi: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights

alphamundi

What are the phases of the approach?

VfW designs and guides the TA engagement in three phases:

1. Diagnostic & Design: After SME selection through a funnel approach, VfW conducts a robust gender assessment with the SME to identify opportunities. VfW then develops options for business first, gender-smart strategies with resource requirements and cost/impact analysis considerations.
2. Piloting & Validation: Once SMEs select priority activities, VfW co-develops an MOU with the SME that includes detailed work plans and indicators. Strategies are then piloted and tested over an 8–10-month period with metrics measured on an ongoing basis and pilots adjusted as needed.
3. Sharing: Final impact data and next steps on how strategies can be further refined and/or institutionalized are shared with SMEs. Lessons are also shared publicly in the GLI space.

Any thoughts on applying the theory to practice?

While the foundation of the approach is the same, VfW tweaks every step to the SME's local operating context. VfW may adjust the sequencing of certain steps in line with the SME's availability and also assign roles differently depending on SME staff capabilities.

What resources are necessary for this engagement?

AlphaMundi manages the initial screening and conversations with SMEs and provides the subsidy to support VfW's work with each company (subsidy varies per SME depending on the scope and number of interventions). After SME selection, VfW conducts the gender assessment, designs the TA, develops tools and guidance to implement the TA, supports the SME with implementation and troubleshooting, and develops learning products. The SME carries out TA activities and shares responsibilities to collect monitoring data with VfW. The SME liaison dedicates 2–3 hours biweekly, department leads for associated activities spend 2–4 hours biweekly, and the CEO is required for about an hour monthly. AlphaMundi regional investment teams engage as needed.

TOOLS USED

Gender Diagnostic Tool (See page 46)

Companies complete an adapted version during the due diligence process. AlphaMundi generates 'heat maps' that provide a visual representation of current strengths and opportunities for gender equity improvement across key business areas.

What are key factors that facilitate the success of the approach?

- 1) Strong trust between the investor and implementing partner, which is a function of the length of engagement and communication, is critical for success. An experienced and technically competent implementing partner allows AlphaMundi to step away, creating a safe space for SME engagement.
- 2) At the selection stage, AlphaMundi and VfW conduct a careful determination of fit to ensure minimal SME attrition. Given AlphaMundi's strong working relationship with their SME, they have honest conversations with SME leadership to make their final selection decision and allow VfW to hit the ground running.
- 3) VfW contextualizes

messaging on the need for gender inclusivity to respond to SME leadership priorities. They ensure that the edification process on gender equity and its financial value is not via "talk-down" lectures but delivered instead through effective conversations, organically and consciously weaved throughout discussions with SME leadership and staff.

What are insights for investors starting on this journey?

- 1) A strong commitment from SME leadership is key to driving company engagement and positive outcomes.
- 2) Gender strategies focused on customer marketing and sales are better suited for 'business to consumers' (B2C) than 'business to business' (B2B) SMEs, whereas human resources strategies can be compelling to both B2C and B2B companies.
- 3) SMEs most likely to benefit from gender inclusive strategies are past the seed stage, with a consistent business model, and with staff bandwidth to implement new activities alongside running their business.
- 4) A gender diagnostic phase to identify the highest potential TA activities is a must as each SME faces different challenges and presents unique opportunities.

- "When we first refer to a 'gender strategy', SME leadership might imagine a strategy that benefits only women or excludes men. This might strike CEOs as problematic. In the course of our engagement, many CEOs realize that when we talk about gender strategies, we seek to increase an understanding of women's and men's needs and preferences, and respond to these differences instead of assuming a one size fits all...If we meet a company where they are at, there's a lot of opportunity for change and traction."

Asya Troychansky

Senior Gender & Business Advisor, VfW

What are early gains seen from using this approach?

The data and insights gathered through the gender and business assessment activities provide a treasure trove of information and insights for SME leadership. VfW also delivers a menu of contextualized TA strategies which can be implemented post-VfW engagement. Finally, through formal and informal conversations on gender, VfW sensitizes SME leadership to gender mainstreaming and transfers critical skills to institutionalize gender inclusion.

What has been an "aha" moment, so far?

Investors must understand the bounds of what impact is possible, the extent to which their investment vehicles can influence SME leadership, and where investor and SME spheres of influence and control can extend to other stakeholders.

Root Capital: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights



INVESTOR PROFILE

Current loan disbursements	\$90.4M
Asset class	Debt
Sector	Food & ag
2X Criteria	More than 30% of portfolio companies meet direct criteria on Entrepreneurship, Leadership, Employment, or Consumption
Regions	Latin America, East and West Africa, South East Asia
Investees stage of growth	Stage 3 (growth) ¹
Implementation partner	In-house

What is Root Capital's commitment to gender lens investing (GLI)?

In 2012, Root Capital created the [Women in Agriculture Initiative](#) (WAI) to help its clients (small and growing agricultural enterprises, henceforth called SMEs) address the inequalities faced by women in rural areas and to ensure that business growth and impact are gender-inclusive. Since 2016, Root Capital has implemented the [Gender Equity Grants](#) (GEG) program as a flagship initiative of the WAI, providing businesses with a moderate cash infusion (up to \$20,000) to implement projects that increase women's participation across agricultural value chains.

What is the GEG program?

GEGs, which provide grant funding for a one-year period, help pursue activities that advance women's participation and leadership. Beyond cost-sharing assistance for specific activities, the participatory diagnostic and gender equity training built into the program helps SMEs to identify needs and gain organizational buy-in to pursue a broader gender equity agenda. To date, Root Capital has implemented 18 GEGs across East Africa and Central and South America, focusing on women's climate resilience, agronomic training, savings capacity, and child care, among other areas.

How are SMEs invited to the GEG program?

When grant funding is available, Root Capital invites select SMEs to apply to the GEG program based in part on their financial standing, capacity to engage in a grant project, and their commitment to gender inclusion and other grant areas of focus. Root Capital's lending and advisory teams vet each SME for participation. Before beginning the application process, Root Capital explains the process, roles and responsibilities to SME leadership, gauges buy-in to participate in the multi-step process, and requests a commitment to participate.

How does Root Capital kickstart the GEG grant process and application?

The GEG grant process is highly collaborative to reduce the burden of project management on SME leadership. Once the invited SME confirms their intent to apply to the program, Root Capital conducts a participatory diagnostic exercise with SME leadership, managers, employees, farmers, and other key women stakeholders. The diagnostic includes semi-structured interviews to collect data on the critical needs and interests of these groups and incorporates gender equity training. Root Capital then conducts an action-planning workshop with these groups to share findings and co-design evidence-based, gender-inclusive project proposals (TA). Root Capital supports SME leadership in completing the grant application and this TA design forms the basis of the SME's GEG project. SMEs that successfully complete the process and apply for the grant receive funding to implement the activities designed through the workshop.

How are roles and responsibilities divided?

For each GEG, Root Capital identifies eligible SMEs, leads the diagnostic process and project planning workshops, approves proposals, provides guidance and technical assistance (such as entrepreneurship or agronomic training) to support project implementation, conducts active monitoring, and jointly addresses challenges. SME leadership, staff, and women beneficiaries participate in diagnostics and gender sensitization workshops, develop project proposals, and implement and report on the projects.

- *"We keep our clients and farmers at the center of our grant making process, and we hold ourselves accountable to them. We request all persons who will benefit from the program to share their voice. We include the board, the founders, and the directors in the diagnostic because they are the decision-makers; but just as importantly, we also talk to both men and women farmers, and the employees since they cut across the enterprise and producers."*

Erick Sakwa

Impact and Advisory Manager, Root Capital

1. Companies are categorized as Stage 1 (seed), Stage 2 (early), and Stage 3 (growth). Seed stage companies tend to have a limited support team, are field-testing their business model, are pre-revenue or less than \$200K in revenue, have negative cash flows, and raise from their network. Early stage companies have a team of 10–50 personnel, have an established product/service, generate revenues between \$200K–2M, generate enough positive cash flow to service debt, and raise through their network, seed rounds, and possibly Series A. Growth stage companies have a team of 50+ personnel and are likely operating across markets, have a well-established product/service, revenues of \$2M+, EBITDA positive, and are past Series A funding.

Root Capital: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights



What are key factors that facilitate the success of the approach?

1) SMEs contribute their own resources—human and often financial—to implement the GEGs, which creates a strong sense of ownership and pride in the activities. 2) The diagnostic is conducted by a gender expert who can probe deeply to understand existing gender barriers and opportunities; for example, questioning when employees share that “they treat all men and women farmers equally.” Additionally, Root Capital brings external experts to help implement the TA when needed; examples include an HR expert to develop inclusive policies or an expert who covers the intersectionality of gender and climate. 3) Root Capital has found that SMEs become more self-aware and sensitive towards gender issues through their engagement in the GEG program. This awareness helps leadership embrace and implement policies that make the workplace inclusive and also ensures project sustainability.

What are insights for investors starting on this journey?

1) Through multiple iterations of the GEG program, Root Capital has identified numerous [common themes](#) regarding women's needs in the food and agriculture sector ranging from diversified income streams, access to healthcare services, and reduced uncertainty related to childcare. Many of the GEG projects have tackled these needs, and participating SME leadership, employees, and women farmers have shared that they would not be able to adopt gender-inclusive practices to address these issues without the GEG program. For Root Capital, a grant of up to \$20,000 is a low-to-medium cash infusion and risk, leading to measurable key social and business performance gains for all stakeholders involved. 2) SME buy-in is a critical component to project success when making investments related to gender inclusion. Furthermore, organizations with greater prior exposure to/interest in gender inclusion tend to be most engaged in the GEG project and most likely to continue inclusion-related advancements once the project comes to a close.

What are positive gains from the GEG program to SMEs?

1) The GEG program has had [measurable economic impact](#) among women farmers and employees and strengthens the business case for gender inclusion among participating SMEs. For example, GEGs that have focused on implementing savings and credit projects targeting women have enabled them to access much-needed credit that women used to launch new small businesses or purchase assets. In addition, GEG projects that have focused on strengthening women's skills and opportunities as entrepreneurs have helped them launch new businesses and sources of income. 2) Root Capital has seen an increase in client retention, and brand and farmer loyalty among SMEs participating in the GEG program. The SMEs appreciate that Root Capital provides both grant capital and technical know-how alongside its lending and advisory services. 3) The in-depth diagnostic activities generate essential knowledge for program and policy improvements that the SME leadership can use after the GEG grant. They also provide information to strengthen the business and/or impact case for implementing TA, arming SMEs with the data and proof of concept to seek other funding sources.

What are other positive gains from the program?

Beyond what has been shared above, the findings and recommendations from these grants also inform Root Capital's broader gender inclusion strategies and initiatives. For example, Root Capital is piloting a SACCO (group savings and loan organization) program with numerous clients in East Africa after the success of a SACCO project implemented under a recent GEG.

• *“In one of our participating co-operatives, leadership found the climate resilience diagnostic to be so useful that they have decided to roll out the tool more broadly, extending it beyond the small sample included in the GEG process. They want to do this to understand all women and men producers' situations to build the business's climate resilience. The SME also wants to investigate the differences between these groups to generate lessons on the roles and the importance of women in the co-operative and in agriculture, more generally.”*

Lula Pérez

Senior Advisor, Mexico and Central America, Root Capital

What has been an “aha” moment, so far?

Root Capital has seen SMEs, on their own accord, implement post-GEG policies and programs to support women based on the findings of the diagnostic process that identified gender gaps, and also because the GEG helped make the business case for investing in women. For example, one GEG project in Peru allowed the women's association that is affiliated with a Root Capital SME to start a new coffee roasting and grinding business. Upon observing success, the SME decided to invest some of its profits in the women's business and give the women's association a seat on its board. Similarly, in Kenya, one GEG recipient that used their grant to fund a daycare for women employees created a maternity leave policy to better support new mothers and retain employees. These are not only surprising success stories, but also the impetus for Root Capital's new gender equity TA service being developed at present with [Value for Women](#).

SEAF: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights



INVESTOR PROFILE	
Assets under management	\$330M
Asset class	Debt, equity
Sector	Healthcare, education, food & ag, business & financial services, climate resilience
2X Criteria	SEAF's Women's Economic Empowerment criteria —all categories
Regions	Emerging Asia, Latin America, East Africa, MENA, Eastern Europe
Investees stage of growth	Stage 3 (growth) ¹
Implementation partner	In-house, Center for Entrepreneurial and Executive Development (CEED) ²

What is SEAF's commitment to gender lens investing (GLI)?

SEAF is strongly dedicated to women's economic empowerment and gender equality, in particular targeting areas where gender bias is especially present. SEAF aims to generate shared value by investing in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that 1) are women-led, 2) are active in sectors where women are more prevalent, 3) produce goods and services to address unmet needs of women and girls, and 4) have leadership who demonstrate a commitment to gender equality. SEAF has developed a proprietary tool, the [Gender Equality Scorecard® \(GES®\)](#), guided and vetted by experts across academia and public and private sectors, to objectively measure SME gender inclusion metrics and help identify gaps in their strategies and opportunities for growth. The GES® enables dialogue and design of value-creating, gender-smart technical assistance (TA) to leverage gender diversity to improve business performance.

What is the GES® tool?

The GES® provides a composite numerical score across six vectors: pay equity, women's workforce participation, benefits and professional development, gender-diverse leadership and governance, safe and healthy workplace environment, and women-powered value chains, to help SEAF and the SME measure progress towards gender equality. SEAF uses the GES® throughout their investment lifecycle—at origination to select SMEs and have open conversations with the SME leadership, during due diligence to score SMEs and develop post-investment gender improvement projects with the value creation planning, through portfolio monitoring to track GES® scores, and at exit to refine and validate the gender strategy. The tool's user-friendly and practitioner-oriented [manual](#) comes

with detailed instructions and templates to enable accurate scoring and standardized calculations of the vectors.

SEAF performs the first baseline assessment and works closely with the SME human resources team to collect the quantitative data. SEAF also conducts interviews with key persons such as the CEO, HR manager, suppliers, employees, and customers to gather data on the effectiveness of policies and programs relevant to the tool. SEAF then hands over subsequent quarterly assessments to designated staff at the SME and regularly reviews the process and scores, as part of TA implementation and annual audit.

What are the different uses of the tool?

Given the tool's versatility and comprehensiveness, SEAF uses the GES® at multiple points to guide TA strategies to support gender inclusion, as mentioned above. SEAF also uses the GES® scores to demonstrate to internal and external stakeholders that a portfolio of SMEs is approaching gender equality. And finally, SEAF uses the GES® to provide insight to validate SEAF's investment [thesis](#), "that companies with strong internal gender equality are superior business performers".

- *"During the due diligence process, we do not reject a company because it obtains a low GES® score. Instead, the GES® enables conversations with the SME leadership and employees and gives us a sign early on of their commitment to gender equality. We note how the potential candidate reacts to the tool and if they find it valuable, as well as the areas where we can help them improve gender inclusion. Post-investment, we want to see leadership committed to revisiting gender equality issues through regular use of the tool and institutionalizing the practice and mentality even after we exit. This is critical to our long term vision towards women's economic empowerment."*

Ingrid Chou
Associate, SEAF

What are SEAF's long-term goals with the GES®?

SEAF has identified a critical gap in data and research to prove the business case for GLI and concentrated TA. Furthermore, based on the slow response of capital providers to mobilize funds towards GLI, linked to the way they underwrite their investments

1. Companies are categorized as Stage 1 (seed), Stage 2 (early), and Stage 3 (growth). Seed stage companies tend to have a limited support team, are field-testing their business model, are pre-revenue or less than \$200K in revenue, have negative cash flows, and raise from their network. Early stage companies have a team of 10–50 personnel, have an established product/service, generate revenues between \$200K–2M, generate enough positive cash flow to service debt, and raise through their network, seed rounds, and possibly Series A. Growth stage companies have a team of 50+ personnel and are likely operating across markets, have a well-established product/service, revenues of \$2M+, EBITDA positive, and are past Series A funding.
2. CEED was created by SEAF to support entrepreneurs in the growth of their companies.

SEAF: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights



in funds, SEAF sees the need for a gender rating system, similar to the debt market's credit rating system. Hence, the long-term goal is that SEAF, with the support from an academic partner, will build a database of GES© scores and encourage the use of the GES© beyond SEAF's portfolio of SMEs. The database's availability will enable robust, statistically significant analysis by researchers to demonstrate positive correlations between gender equality and SME financial performance and subsequently, better investment return performance.

What kinds of resources are necessary to use the GES©?

Implementing the GES© tool has upfront costs that diminish to 2–3 hours of the HR manager's time per scoring instance, as familiarity with the tool grows. SEAF initiates the tool's use, introduces it to SME leadership and works closely with the HR manager or assigned staff member to conduct the assessment. In the first application, SEAF and the HR manager can expect to spend 3–5 hours gathering data, 7 hours conducting interviews with key stakeholders, and 2–4 hours scoring the vectors. SEAF notes that information systems and HR team size and capacity impact the amount of time necessary to gather the data.

TOOLS USED

[Gender Equality Scorecard© Manual & GES© Case Studies](#)

What are key factors that facilitate the success of the tool?

1) SEAF's Women's Economic Empowerment team and SEAF's dedicated investment officer provide support and resources to the SME's HR manager to regularly implement the GES© and integrate it into HR operations. SEAF guides the HR manager on how to use the templates, calculate the scores and troubleshoot when working with challenging systems. 2) The GES© manual is an easy read, intended to be accessible for those SMEs who are just beginning their gender equality journey. 3) The GES© performance vectors align with [IRIS+ metrics](#), use well-accepted language, enable data integration and operationality, and reduce the reporting burden on SME leadership.

- *"We are so proud of the GES© manual; we hope that the manual is something that anyone can read and then understand why measuring gender equality is important and how to go about it. We want entrepreneurs to internalize using a gender lens to tackle key challenges and see the benefits of improving the GES© score. We also recently released case studies to bring to life the depth and benefits of the tool".*

Jennifer Buckley
Senior Managing Director, SEAF

What are insights for investors starting on this journey?

SEAF has found that investors and entrepreneurs are hesitant to use the tool at first because of staff and time resources needed to implement it. However, SEAF notes that these are worth the costs because the dialogues that spring forth from the use of the tool and the organized and formal actions taken by SME leadership to increase their GES© scores, signal to employees their leadership's deep dedication to gender diversity. This in turn strengthens employee loyalty. For example, in one SME in the Philippines, SEAF noted improvements in employee retention and willingness to be flexible even when the SME had to make difficult decisions during the pandemic, because the employees found that the entrepreneurs continued to prove their perseverance towards advancing gender equality.

- *"The manual was a labor of love supported by experts and produced through collaboration across many organizations. The manual also highlights the partnerships in this field which are critical for the wider vision of what we're all trying to achieve: gender equality and value creation for all stakeholders. These alliances will be especially needed to develop a library of best practices and TA strategies, to further support entrepreneurs on their journey to gender inclusion."*

Rowena Reyes
Director, SEAF

What are positive gains from using the tool?

1) The GES© enables SMEs to share their impacts and progress on gender equality through objective, quantitative measures, using commonly adopted gender inclusion language. When their scores improve, it highlights successes and creates strong messaging to other SME leadership to adopt gender inclusion practices. 2) The tool's use has helped SEAF's investment officers expand their understanding of GLI beyond the typical categories of investing in women-led businesses. It has improved gender perceptions and also helped investment officers think of gender more holistically. This change enables them to communicate better with SME leadership on social and financial impacts of gender equality.

What has been an "aha" moment, so far?

Introducing GES© in new investment work is widely accepted at SEAF and with the entrepreneur. But when used retrospectively with existing portfolio companies, where gender equality was not part of the underwriting, SEAF is cognizant of how they present the message of gender equality and the requirement to use the tool to these entrepreneurs. SME leadership indeed agree to use the tool, but it is essential to recognize that they did not sign up to do so when they first came on board.

Shell Foundation: An introduction to the investor's approach and insights

INVESTOR PROFILE

Assets under management	N/A
Asset class	Grant, repayable grant, other
Sector	Energy access ¹ , sustainable transport
2X Criteria	All
Regions	East, West, and Southern Africa, South Asia
Investees stage of growth	Various ²
Implementation partner	Value for Women

What is Shell Foundation's commitment to gender lens investments (GLI)?

Shell Foundation (SF), an independent UK charity established in 2000, provides gender-specific business support (i.e., gender smart technical assistance—TA) for its portfolio of social enterprises (i.e., small and medium enterprises—SMEs), and is working to demonstrate the improved impact and financial performance resulting from this support. SF's gender strategy consists of three pillars: 1) evidencing the positive impact of gender inclusion on business and social performance, 2) supporting the market to unlock gender-lens capital, and 3) improving gender-impact measurement for the sector. The organization is embedding gender inclusion across its model, from identification of social enterprises with women as leaders, entrepreneurs, employees, and consumers, through to the high-touch business support it provides its portfolio and the collection and sharing of the gender impact.

- *"Data... has revealed that early integration of gender inclusion into the core business model, values, and culture of a business delivers a significant uplift in performance and social impact, and is therefore a substantial competitive advantage. We are working to further evidence this, and to align our data with fellow investors, to make an un-questionable business case for adopting a holistic approach to gender inclusion at the start of an entrepreneur's journey..."*

Richard Gomes

Deputy CEO, Shell Foundation

Who are SF's key implementing partners?

SF has partnered with Value for Women (VfW) on developing business support initiatives for portfolio SMEs since 2016. This support is co-funded by The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) as part of a long-standing strategic partnership.

What is some of the early work that SF has conducted in this space?

In line with SF's commitment to building the gender lens evidence base, SF and VfW released a [landmark report](#) in 2018 that made a case for a "bottom-up", business-first approach to gender inclusion in SMEs. They tested whether gender inclusive strategies—which address business challenges and opportunities affecting women employees, customers, and others in the SME value chain—could have an impact on business performance.

What is SF's approach to designing and implementing TA?

Whereas many impact investors have traditionally focused their GLI and gender inclusive strategies exclusively on Human Resources (HR) and leadership (i.e. companies with women as owners, in the C-Suite, and Board), SF has aspired to build a portfolio that embodies gender-equitable practices across all areas and functions of a business. Early iterations of the approach focused on ways to make strategic changes in key departments (such as marketing, sales, or operations) that improved conditions for women suppliers/distributors/micro-entrepreneurs or employees, as well as women leaders.

The Value for Women (VfW) approach to designing and implementing gender-smart strategies

VfW is a specialized advisory firm whose partners include impact investors and their portfolio companies, with the aim of furthering gender inclusion objectives for businesses. VfW is the gender technical service provider to the G-SEARCH consortium.

As the active implementing partner to consortium members, AHL Ventures, AlphaMundi, and Shell Foundation, VfW provides tailored gender support to SMEs by designing, piloting, and refining gender-smart strategies across business functions. Their approach includes an SME selection process, an in-depth gender and business diagnostic, and developing a menu of options for gender and business strategies that lead to concrete business practice changes. VfW then guides the SMEs during the process of implementation of selected strategies and supports them with results measurement. VfW has been championing this approach since 2015, including one of the first iterations developed in partnership with the Shell Foundation.

1. Access to energy for household and business use, as well as establishing off-grid utilities.

2. Shell Foundation typically partners from seed stage to post-breakeven and provides patient support as partners transition to commercial capital.

Over the last four years, SF has asked its portfolio to complete a self-assessment survey to describe their gender inclusion capacities. For SMEs that showed a willingness to co-invest resources, VfW conducted a detailed diagnostic process to understand the business model and challenges, and then co-determine the business areas of focus. VfW then designed and tested relevant gender-inclusive solutions for the identified business challenges. Pilots lasted 2–4 months, and results and recommendations were shared with SME leadership. These pilots demonstrated early business benefits from applying gender lens approaches, such as increased sales and increased productivity, as well as increased impact.

This approach has since been refined and adopted by various G-SEARCH members and is being studied for implementation by a much wider range of impact investors. In 2018, VfW executed a second phase of pilots and research to continue building the evidence, better understand best pathways to gender-smart performance improvement, and create frameworks that allow for a broader uptake of this approach.

How are roles and responsibilities divided?

SF evaluates gender inclusion metrics annually and SMEs receive significant support from SF's team to develop appropriate gender strategies. VfW implements the gender lens pilots, often a high-touch process with significant consultant level of effort for design, guidance, and advisory. VfW engages with the selected SMEs depending on resources and context. So far, VfW has worked directly with SME staff when carrying out TA work, and with local consultants hired by the SME to support the project. VfW has worked both on-site and remotely to carry out strategy implementation, data collection, and performance analysis. VfW guides the SME, but SME staff implement TA activities as they know their business best. During the pilots, VfW typically conducts weekly or bi-weekly calls with the partners.

What are key factors that facilitate the success of the approach?

The social enterprise's level of buy-in and willingness to invest management time and their own matched resources has correlated with the greatest outcomes. Beyond this, tailoring the TA support to the stage of growth of the enterprise is critical.

What are insights for investors starting on this journey?

Gender impact and inclusion can be optimized across every business function, not simply HR as is often thought. For each area of business there are myriad ways to improve gender inclusion and impact, from collecting sex-disaggregated data to creating financing mechanisms to better reach women consumers. Optimizing core business functions for gender inclusiveness can improve business performance and depth of impact. SF has seen its portfolio companies double production, increase sales by over 50%, improve collections, and increase incomes for women micro-entrepreneurs through relevant strategies. Emerging market SMEs require guidance to identify and implement these strategies. Further lessons for investors beginning this journey are captured in this SF-VfW [summary](#).

What has been an "aha" moment, so far?

"The data collected so far on the effectiveness of different strategies applied by social enterprises at very different stages of growth has revealed that the early integration of gender inclusion into the core business model, values, and culture of a business delivers a significant uplift in performance and social impact, and is therefore a substantial competitive advantage. We are working to further evidence this, and to align our data with fellow investors, to make an un-questionable business case for adopting a holistic approach to gender inclusion at the start of an entrepreneur's journey... rather than waiting until a business reaches an 'optimum' size or imagined state of stability." Richard Gomes, Deputy CEO, Shell Foundation.



Our next steps for the gender lens investing (GLI) community

While we have seen an uptick in investors taking on gender-smart technical assistance (TA), there is a stark gap for research products that evaluate its gains and cost-effectiveness. Our research will next capture the voice of SME leadership to hear their thoughts on these approaches. We will also incorporate employee-level data on potential changes in gender perceptions and attitudes as gathered by Value for Women (VfW). We aim to conduct sense-making workshops in Fall 2021 with gender experts and GLI community members to discuss the analysis and insights, with final reports to follow.

Indicators

WDI is also investigating the efficacy of TA undertaken by the six investors of the consortium. Below, we highlight a few key TA strategies with their relevant indicators. SMEs will share these data (where available) with the consortium for analysis to develop the business case for such TA.

BUSINESS FUNCTION	SAMPLE TA STRATEGIES	SOCIAL INDICATORS/ PROXIES	FINANCIAL INDICATORS
Human Resources (HR)	Improve HR policies and practices to formalize and strengthen gender equity	- Number of gender-inclusive changes to HR policies - Number of sensitization efforts on new policies	- Sales - Net margin
Marketing and advertising	Capture motivations of women buyers and use in targeted marketing campaigns	- Number of good practices identified for selling to women - Number of new messages developed for selling to women	- Stakeholder acquisition - Stakeholder productivity, where possible - Employee retention - Employee tenure
Data analytics	Collect sex-disaggregated data to identify needs and interest of women stakeholders. Similarly conduct analysis with a gender lens to improve product development	- Improved knowledge of data analysis and data collection among staff - Number of new gender-smart performance indicators - Number of new/adjustments made to the services	

Adapting to COVID-19

Investors and implementing partners such as VfW have made necessary modifications to their approaches to designing and implementing TA to respond to the pandemic. With travel bans and lockdowns in place, all organizations have adjusted methodologies and delivery mechanisms to enable virtual TA and have invested in additional tools and training for the teams to deliver the TA remotely. Investors and implementing partners have also offered adjustable timelines and dropout options for participating SMEs. They have also provided enterprises with the option to include TA strategies to promote business recovery and resilience.

About WDI

The William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan (WDI) is guided by our founding principle that thriving businesses drive economic development and improve social welfare in low- and middle-income countries. For more information on our GLI research efforts, please see [here](#).