

Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (AWEF) & the SEEP Network Women's Economic Empowerment in Market Systems Learning Series

Webinar 6 Summary

Background

Funded by the U.K. Department for International Development and working in Jordan and Egypt the Arab Women's Enterprise Fund (AWEF) stimulates increased women's economic empowerment through a market systems approach. As part of its learning and knowledge management strategy, AWEF has partnered with the SEEP Network (SEEP) to conduct a two-year learning series on women's economic empowerment (WEE) in market systems development (MSD). The series consists of quarterly webinars and an annual practitioner learning brief, with the purpose of catalysing discussion and engagement on the topic and sharing current initiatives, good practices and lessons amongst and between donors and practitioners in WEE in MSD.

Date & Time: 8.30 am EDT, July 24th

Title: Working with the Private Sector to Empower Women: How to Build the Business Case for Change

Presenters:

Julia Hakspiel, Learning Manager, Arab Women's Enterprise Fund
Margaux Yost, Manager, Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)

Moderator:

Adriano Scarampi, Technical Adviser, Arab Women's Enterprise Fund

[Webinar Recording Link](#)

Summary

The private sector is an essential partner in the process of women's economic empowerment. By adopting business practices that include and support women as workers, consumers, producers and suppliers, firms can not only make an important contribution to the process of women's economic empowerment, but also expand their market, achieve greater business efficiency, and improve their bottom line. A business case can help firms understand why women's inclusion and empowerment is important for their mission and values, business model and stakeholders. However a compelling case can be hard to develop. The approach must be pragmatic, relevant and tailored to the country context, constraints facing women, the sector in question and the specific interests of private sector partners. In this webinar speakers from AWEF and BSR shared diverse approaches, tools, data and metrics that can be used to build a compelling business case to the private sector. As part of this Webinar, AWEF launched its first Practitioner Learning Brief - ["Working with the Private Sector to Empower Women: What to Measure and How to Build the Business Case for Change"](#).

Julia Hakspiel provided an overview of key frameworks and concepts presented in the Practitioner Learning Brief, which builds on the experience of implementing AWEF over the past 4 years as well as 17 case studies from the wider practitioner community. She highlighted that the process of business case development has to be co-created with the private sector, with each step undertaken side by side with the partner firm. Practitioners need to work closely with private sector partners when selecting the business case analysis framework and relevant business performance indicators and make sure these are closely aligned with their business incentives. This can be done based on the segmentation of women into different categories as consumers, workers and producers or suppliers, but should also be informed by industry and value chain specific indicators and the size of the business. For example, strengthening women's workforce participation and leadership can benefit companies by improving their access to a larger and more diverse labour pool and skills, reducing operating costs associated with recruitment and turnover and improving productivity and quality of work. Such benefits can be tracked through a number of metrics. AWEF's intervention in the ready-made-garments (RMG) sector in partnership with Arafa Group generated over 120,000USD in annual savings for the firm, as a result of the improvements in worker turnover and absenteeism rates, lower recruitment costs and improved its performance in audits and inspections from buyers. Julia also listed some of the other key lessons captured by the Brief in relation to the business case development process. Firstly the data required for the business case is often confidential and highly sensitive – it's very important to agree on data sharing arrangements with the partner up front, including what results and data can be shared and with whom. While it is important to select quantifiable metrics, qualitative data still needs to be collected to inform the 'hard' data analysis. Qualitative results in the form of case studies and testimonials can also be equally compelling to a firm. Finally it's essential we help firms pitch and disseminate the business case internally, ensuring buy-in across different departments of the organization.

Margaux Yost spoke about BSR's experience of implementing HERProject, which drives impact for women and business via proven workplace-based interventions on health, financial inclusion and gender equality, working in sectors that primarily employ women. HERproject focuses on supporting companies to integrate a gender lens at the raw materials and manufacturing stages of their supply chain. Marguax highlighted three key guiding questions for business case development – who is business case for?; how does the programme respond to business needs?; and how will the data be used?. HERProject works with a diverse set of stakeholders, including suppliers, manufacturers and producers; business associations; brand and buyers and governments, foundations and bilateral. All of these actors have different interests when it comes to the business case – this requires practitioners to tailor how potential benefits from the interventions are presented to them. For example the first engagement BSR has with a firm's top management is very much about walking a thin line between identifying a need that can improve workers' lives but will speak to management and their business priorities. Once an intervention is underway, BSR utilizes a before-after comparison to keep track of different data points at baseline, endline and on a monthly basis, using both a mix social and business indicators. BSR will also at times engage third party service providers to

conduct a deep study often in the form of either an ROI or a benefit to cost analysis for a particular intervention. For example a recent benefit to cost study of HERhealth project implementation in a factory in India found a 2.77 benefit to cost ratio in terms of the business and social benefits generated. As HERProject has worked with over 800 factories and farms they have a number of practical lessons to share on the business case development process. Firstly it's important to ensure you have right partners to reach the private sector - only with the right partners do we even have a chance to reach and access these different workplaces. Secondly building trust with partners is key to ensuring their willingness, want or motivation to collect and understand the business case data. Finally, working with the partner to put in place workplace systems to track key data points in the long-term can help ensure the sustainability of the interventions.

