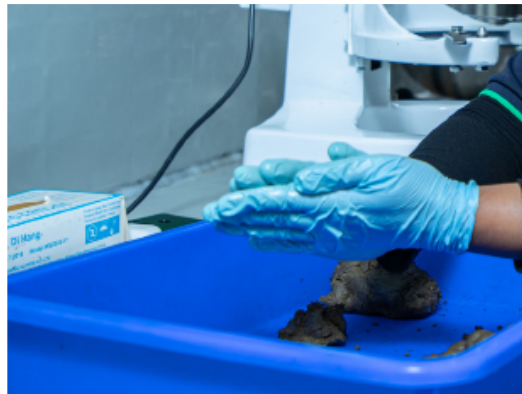




Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Inclusive is not enough

Agrifood value chains need
gender-responsive business development



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Acronyms

AU	African Union
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
BoP	Base of Pyramid
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
IB	Inclusive business
IBM	Inclusive business model
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
G20	Group of Twenty
GBC	Gender-based constraint
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
iBAN	Inclusive Business Action Network
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGRB	Inclusive gender-responsive business
IGRBM	Inclusive gender-responsive business model
NENA	Near East and North Africa
MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprise
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RAF	FAO Regional Office for Africa
RNE	FAO Regional Office for Near East and North Africa
ROI	Return on investment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and medium enterprise
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
USD	United States Dollar
WFP	World Food Programme



Introduction



Inclusive agribusiness development has been increasingly prioritized by countries and development organizations as a key driver of economic growth, rural transformation and shared prosperity.

In Africa, several high-level continental African Union policies and strategies feature this objective, including the Maputo Declaration, the Malabo Declaration, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, the Agenda 2063 (The Africa we want) and, most recently, the African Free Continental Trade Area (AfCFTA). The 32nd session of the FAO Africa Regional Conference, in April 2022, recommended all Member Countries “invest in the development of technical capacity and leadership skills, gender-responsive agrifood value chains and support women-run businesses by establishing business-development services and agro-processing centres” (FAO 2022, p. 13).



In the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region, developing competitive and inclusive value chains and agribusiness is identified as a key pillar for promoting rural transformation by many national strategies. The point was also highlighted at the FAO Regional Conference for the Near East, in February 2022. The ministerial session, in particular, outlined “the importance of mobilizing public and private investments in rural areas, including infrastructure and agribusinesses in a way that is inclusive and ensures no one is left behind”.

This brief, jointly developed by the FAO Regional Office for Africa and the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, aims to trigger a critical reflection on the concept of inclusive agribusiness and propose a new definition that highlights the importance of considering gender equality and women’s empowerment as an integral component of agribusiness development. Despite the overall ambition to make agricultural development and rural transformation more equitable, many of those concerned remain systematically marginalized and are therefore unable to seize opportunities arising from value chain and agribusiness development. Women, and rural women in particular, are among those who risk being left behind. Many examples of gender-based inequality and discrimination persist both in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and in the NENA region, preventing rural women from fully participating in, contributing to and benefiting from agribusiness development. However, these inequalities, and the solutions to address them, often remain overlooked in national and regional agribusiness policies, strategies and programmes.

While inclusive agribusinesses have received support in many countries, a review of relevant information to develop this brief has revealed that not many documented examples exist of businesses that can be considered gender-responsive. While some good and promising practices may be undocumented or under-reported, this gap suggests a general failure to understand how agribusiness development can contribute to promoting gender equality objectives, by addressing the specific constraints faced by women in agrifood systems. By proposing a new definition of inclusive and gender-responsive businesses, and outlining their main features with concrete examples, this paper aims to help fill the gap and support future initiatives undertaken by FAO and other partners in SSA and across the NENA region.





Inclusive business

The concept of inclusive business refers to ventures “which seek to contribute towards poverty alleviation by including lower-income communities within its value chains, while not losing sight of the ultimate goal of business, which is to generate profits” (WBCSD and SNV, 2008).

Therefore, businesses can be defined as inclusive when leading simultaneously to:

- i) increased profitability for the company, because of lower supply costs, market expansion through the inclusion of low-income sectors, and/or greater sustainability of the business activity; and
- ii) improved living conditions for the poor, because of increased incomes, and/or greater access to goods, services, markets and infrastructure, resulting from their integration into value chains as suppliers, distributors, retailers and customers (WBCSD and SNV, 2008).

The concept of business inclusivity achieved global recognition in 2015 during the G20 Forum, when the Call to Action on Inclusive Business¹ and the G20 Inclusive Business Framework² were launched by the G20 Development Working Group. The approved document of the G20 Forum reads: “Inclusive businesses provide goods, services and livelihoods on a commercially viable basis, either at scale or scalable, to people from the base of pyramid (BoP)³ making them part of the value chain of companies’ core business as suppliers, distributors, retailers, or customers”.

In other words, inclusive businesses are those that “operate with the dual purpose of generating a reasonable profit and creating tangible effect on low-income people’s welfare”. Within this model, low-income people are seen not as beneficiaries, but rather as business partners along the value chain: as clients and customers; producers and suppliers; employees and entrepreneurs (ADB, 2016).

A variety of actors from the private sector, international development organizations and financial institutions have been promoting inclusive business as critical for private sector development, with the aim of creating value that not only reduces costs for, and impact on, marginalized and poor communities, but also

1. See the [G20 Leaders’ Call on Inclusive Business](#), prepared at the G20 summit in Türkiye in 2015.

2. See the [G20 Inclusive Business Framework](#), prepared by the G20 Development Working Group at the G20 summit in Türkiye in 2015.

3. The literature on IBMs defines the BoP as “poor and low-income individuals who lack access to goods, services and opportunities and are broadly described as those who are income constrained” (iBAN, 2021), but has generally failed to provide an in-depth intersectional analysis of who are the different groups and individuals that (with different needs and capacities) the BoP consists of. According to (iBan, 2021), the BoP “may include women and gender minorities, displaced populations, people living with disabilities, and individuals with other social identities that might influence the method of engagement”.



generates economic opportunities for those in the BoP, both as consumers and producers (ODI, 2009; Wach, 2012).

The G20 Inclusive Business Framework (G20, 2015) identified three different categories of inclusive business:

- **Companies with an inclusive business model:**⁴ these businesses integrate the BoP into their core business operations. Commercial viability of the business model is crucial as companies rely primarily on commercial sources of financing for their business operations and aim to realise market returns.
- **Inclusive business activities:** these include BoP people into companies' value chains; however, they are not central to the commercial viability of the company nor do they make up a significant part of the base of customers, suppliers, or business partners. Multinational companies often implement these activities as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) portfolio.
- **Social enterprise initiatives:** this type of inclusive business aims to improve individuals' and communities' economic and social well-being, while institutionalising the pursuit of explicit social objectives. Generally, most profits are reinvested back into the enterprise to fulfil and strengthen its social mission. Not all social enterprises are financially viable, especially those that are small, and they rely on a mix of external financial resources.

⁴ A business model describes how any given enterprise – large or small, informal or formal – does business, markets its products, and sources inputs and finance. The adoption of a business model perspective allows the identification of more entry points for promoting socio-economic and environmental sustainability, inclusivity and gender equality.



Applying the concept of inclusive business in agriculture



The concept of inclusivity has been widely applied in agricultural development, where inclusive business has become associated with the idea that **integrating smallholder producers and other small-scale and/or disadvantaged actors into partnerships with agribusiness firms can generate benefits for national economies, private investors and local livelihoods.**

Inclusive agribusiness development is therefore seen as having the potential to promote the fair participation of small-scale farmers in agricultural value chains and combining economic profitability with social and environmental objectives. Social entrepreneurship in the private sector has also triggered the emergence of initiatives seeking to improve livelihoods while strengthening the supply chain of businesses. In this model, non-chain actors, such as NGOs, farmer associations, and local governments act as facilitators to provide settings that companies cannot create on their own (Schelle and Pokorny, 2021, p. 13).



In 2015, FAO also developed guidelines to support the growth of inclusive business models (IBM) that can integrate smallholders into agrifood value chains, based on the experience of pilot projects across Africa, and in the Caribbean and the Pacific regions. The inclusive element of the business models aims to address the constraints that prevent commodity-dependent smallholders and small-scale actors' access to markets.

According to FAO's definition (FAO, 2015), IBMs in agrifood value chains can be divided into four types:

- **producer-driven models** are led by small-scale producer organizations motivated to improve market access through collective action;
- **buyer-driven models** involve larger businesses organizing farmers into suppliers;
- **public institutional-driven models** refer to public sector institutions such as schools, hospitals, food reserve authorities, food aid and school feeding programmes that procure food daily; and
- **intermediary-driven models** are commonly led by local NGOs and involve the provision of technical assistance to improve smallholder market linkages.

In line with the overall concept, these different types of IBMs are meant to address the challenge of integrating the poor and under-served into agrifood value chains, either as food producers, micro- and small-scale entrepreneurs active in post-harvest links of the chain (processing, marketing, etc.) or as consumers, through sustainable agrifood value chain development (FAO, 2014).

Some of these IBMs focus on increasing the productivity of smallholder farmers, by improving their access to inputs, finance, information or extension. Others focus on sourcing from farmers and providing them with better market access or more stable and equitable trading conditions (Rappoldt, Sopov and Guijt, 2017). In practice, the concept of inclusive agribusiness has often been implemented in the form of contract farming models that envisage formal partnership agreements between a company and farmers, whereby the company provides inputs, technical advice and a ready market for farmers who, in turn, supply produce.



Box 1: FAO's criteria for defining inclusive business models

- provides a living wage for vulnerable groups, such as smallholders, small enterprises, women- and youth-run enterprises, while also enabling buyers to profit;
- uses flexible trading arrangements that make it easier for smallholders or micro or small enterprises to supply a buyer, such as cash on delivery, accepting small consignments and providing reliable and regular orders;
- supports farmers and small enterprises to establish a stronger negotiating position through skills development, collective bargaining and access to market information and financial services;
- builds on the skills and expertise of existing market players, including traders and processors, and promotes value chain collaboration, transparency in pricing mechanisms and risk sharing;
- is scalable in the medium-term so that the number of small actors involved can be increased and/or the type of business model can be replicated in other value chains or parts of the sector; and
- allows for diversified income streams in the long-term, enabling the dissemination of upgraded skills in the rest of the sector and avoiding overdependence on any single buyer or market outlet.

Source: FAO, 2015. *Inclusive Business Models*. Rome, FAO. (<https://www.fao.org/3/i5068e/i5068e.pdf>)





To summarize, an agribusiness and/or business model can be considered inclusive when:

- it is accessible to farmers with fewer assets and operating at a smaller scale;
- uses trading practices adapted to the needs of smallholders and that provide them with certain benefits, such as profit, stable market outlets, shared risks, access to services and finance;
- does not create dependency on any one value chain or buyer and provides profitable diversified market options for smallholders;
- builds the capacity of farmers and farmer groups according to market needs; and
- uses transparent platforms and forums to identify and solve problems ([Baltenweck et al., 2022](#)).





Is inclusivity in a business enough to promote women's empowerment?

An inclusive business has the potential to promote women's economic advancement and increase gender equality. The Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2016) highlighted some of the reasons why inclusive business can benefit and accelerate women's economic empowerment:

- the specific focus on the BoP and, in the case of agribusiness, on smallholders and small-scale value chain actors among which women are disproportionately represented;
- the intervention in sectors and on issues relevant to women's lives, including the provision of goods and services that are often lacking in rural areas or are not easily accessible to rural women and female value chain actors, such as financial or rural advisory services;
- the ambition to provide better working conditions and income opportunities, from which women are often excluded; and
- the engagement of low-income people as business partners, not merely beneficiaries, which ultimately aims to recognize their ability to make economic choices and thus empower them.

Despite their potential to promote women's economic empowerment, not all inclusive businesses will necessarily or automatically do so. An analysis of different documents about IBs confirmed the existence of severe limitations in the way in which inclusivity is defined and promoted, which fails explicitly to target gender inequalities and discriminations. The literature review stressed that the promotion of inclusive business tends to be based on general assumptions about "the poor", or the BoP, which overlook differences that exist within this population group in terms of individual needs, capacities, skills and constraints, as well as relations and power dynamics. This has often resulted in generic recommendations on how to integrate the BoP into a business model or value chain, that fails to consider how intersecting and compounding socio-economic dimensions (such as gender, age, residency status, etc.) affect the way in which different people in



the BoP can participate in, and benefit from, inclusive business opportunities. It follows that **the label of inclusivity assigned to a business does not necessarily imply attention and commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.**

The literature also shows that inclusive business models tend to be biased in favour of resource-rich farmers, as smaller farms are often less able to meet participation criteria (such as product and process standards, or the cost of certifications). Inclusive business models are also more likely to engage with formal producer organizations to overcome the challenges of interacting with a large number of fragmented producers (Rappoldt, Sopov and Guijt, 2017). These factors risk restricting women's participation in, and benefits from, these business models. As smallholders and small-scale producers, women in SSA and NENA countries are often among the most resource-poor farmers, due to the gender inequalities that limit their access to and control over land, livestock, and other agricultural resources. Women's participation in producer and other rural organizations is also unequal as their membership is often dependent on land ownership or is automatically granted to men as heads of the household.

In its 2016 Gender-Sensitive Value Chain Framework, FAO introduced the concept of gender-based constraints (GBC) to highlight the importance of identifying and analysing the specific and additional constraints that women face along agrifood value chains as a result of gender-based discrimination. GBCs undermine women's productive and entrepreneurial potential and are the reason why women are often unable to participate in and benefit from their participation in agrifood value chains on equal terms with men. Their identification is critical to ensure that value chain strategies and programmes are designed to respond to men's and women's different roles and needs, and contribute to level the playing field for women as value chain actors (e.g. as workers, as entrepreneurs, as members of producer organizations, etc.). The identification of GBCs is also critical from an economic perspective, as these constraints can negatively affect the economic performance of the value chain, by generating market failures, reductions in the quantity and quality of the production and distortions in the labour market.

The same applies to inclusive agribusiness: if there is no consideration and





no intention to address existing GBCs, then the social inclusion and empowerment potential of the business risks being undermined. Inclusive businesses that are not gender-responsive i.e. those that do not explicitly acknowledge and address the different needs, priorities and constraints of the men and women they aim to integrate – are intrinsically biased and risk reproducing or even exacerbating existing gender inequalities.

Building a gender-responsive approach to inclusive business development requires promoting actions that are simultaneously sound from a business point of view and that address the GBCs which undermine women and girls' entitlements and position in agrifood value chains.

In proceeding towards a concept of inclusive and gender-responsive business, it is also important to acknowledge that women and girls (as well as men and boys) are not homogenous categories. Their capacity to access economic opportunities within agrifood value chains might differ, depending on their age, class, ethnicity, race, education level, geographical location, sexual orientation, residency or (dis)ability status, and proximity to local power structures and leadership.





Defining IGRBs in agrifood systems

The concept of inclusive and gender-responsive businesses (IGRB) aims to help address gender inequalities more explicitly, while supporting the implementation of inclusive agribusiness.

The new proposed definition of IGRBs incorporates gender-responsiveness as a key element of IBs for enhanced economic sustainability, social inclusion and justice. IGRBs are therefore defined as **“IBs that are successful in overcoming existing GBCs and in transforming unequal gender relations in ways that are intentional and aimed at improving women’s socio-economic empowerment.”**

The gender-responsive element – added to inclusive business – prompts a commitment to address the GBCs and the inequalities that prevent women’s (particularly women smallholders and small-scale value chain actors) access to resources, services, markets, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

In other words, **IGRBs are those that “operate with the dual purpose of generating a reasonable profit and creating tangible effect on the welfare of both men and women, acknowledging and addressing the inequalities that affect their position and entitlements”**. This approach goes beyond targeting low-income people as a homogenous group, recognizing the need for tailored strategies and actions. In this approach, women – as well as men – are seen not as beneficiaries, but rather as business partners in the food system (as clients and customers; producers and suppliers; employees and entrepreneurs), emphasizing the need to strengthen their agency and decision-making power, not only their access to resources and services.

Examples of IGRBs can include models that provide access to goods and services specifically designed to meet the needs of women (and rural women in particular), such as financial services tailored to women’s specific constraints (e.g. alternative lending models for people who lack collaterals) or labour-saving practices and technologies that can contribute to reduce their work burden at



different intersections of the value chain. They can also include models that recruit women as distributors or sales agents, to promote women's employment and entrepreneurship while facilitating other women's access to new goods and services (e.g. digital payment services). Lastly, they can also include businesses that design career paths for attracting and retaining women or create a woman-friendly work environment, e.g. by providing childcare services or paid maternity leave (ADB 2016).

While there is a tendency to assimilate IGRBs into women-owned or -led enterprises; in line with the definition in this brief, **IGRBs may equally include women-, men-led or family-led enterprises as long as they fulfil the commitment to identify and actively address GBCs as part of their business.**

In order to support the transition from inclusive business to IGRBs, the following aspects should be considered:

- A detailed gender and intersectional analysis before planning the transition, which identifies the most relevant GBCs affecting the area (technical and geographical) in which the business operates. Such an analysis provides the basis to design gender-responsive actions and measures, for instance: a focus on women's working conditions, inclusive human resource management and gender-sensitive recruitment policies, the provision of childcare services and facilities, and the design of women-friendly products, goods and practices. The analysis is crucial to identify: the compounding drivers of vulnerability and exclusion affecting different actors; the existing power dynamics among them as well as towards other value chain players.
- The explicit intention to foster women's meaningful participation and empowerment by addressing the identified GBCs, including by tackling and transforming the unequal gender roles, social norms and stereotypes that are often at the root of these constraints. For example, making sure that contracts are signed directly with women when they are the ones providing the services or products that the firm requires, and ensuring that payment is channelled directly to them so that women can gain control over the income generated through their work.



- Actions and measures to address the gender-related production, aggregation, processing, distribution and marketing constraints affecting women and women-led enterprises. This can be achieved, for example by enabling women to become more productive in their on- or off-farm activities through opportunities for market engagement, skills development and access to innovation, a decent work environment and certification schemes (European Commission, 2019).
- The commitment to contribute to sustainable incomes for women and the profitability of their business, for example by enhancing access to finance by working with digital financial service providers to design women-friendly products and expand service outreach to women and women entrepreneurs.
- The proactive engagement with a variety of stakeholders (international development partners, national institutions, and organizations involving civil society and producers, as well as community-based organizations) to advance gender equality goals and promote gender-responsiveness in business practices at various levels. For example, work with government standards institutes, the private sector and women producers to streamline certification processes and services and enable women to move up the value chain.



Although much of the focus of these aspects is on women and women-led enterprises as beneficiaries of IGRBs, it is important to note that men-led or family-run enterprises could be equally gender-responsive, depending on the attention they pay to the aspects highlighted above.



How IGRBs address the GBCs affecting women in agrifood systems

Building on the main areas of gender inequality in agribusiness identified by Bishop (Bishop, 2017), the table below provides a synopsis of the most commonly found GBCs and highlights some actions and strategies that IGRBs can adopt to address them.



Table 1: Most common gender-based constraints in agrifood systems and actions to address them

	GBCs	Actions/strategies to address them
Access and control over resources and services	<p>Women tend to have less control over key agricultural assets (such as land and livestock) and less access to resources (quality inputs, fertilizers, etc.). In Africa, women own considerably less land than men; on average their share of owned agricultural land is ten percent. The percentage is even lower in the NENA region, where discriminatory legal frameworks and unequal social norms continue to limit substantially women's ownership and control over land assets.</p> <p>In both regions, women's access to rural advisory services is often inferior to men's, which affects their exposure to, and uptake of, agricultural practices and technologies and consequently reduces their productivity.</p> <p>While internet-based agricultural services have increased, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital gender gap makes it difficult for women to benefit from these services. Only 27 percent of women in SSA have access to the internet, and a mere 15 percent of them can afford or are able to use it (FAO, 2021). Progress in promoting digital inclusion has stalled in the Middle East and North Africa where the gender gap has remained much the same in recent years: at around 16 percent. While this may seem negligible, it means that 56 million women in the region are not yet using mobile internet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable women to become more productive in their on- or off-farm agribusiness activities through better and equitable access to assets, inputs, resources and rural advisory services. • Provide technical training and rural advisory services as part of the business models (for example, as part of contract farming). An IGRB can explicitly target women (as farmers in their own right and as members of family farms) and ensure that training is provided at a time, location and in a format suitable to women's needs. Establishing networks of female sales agents is another solution tested by programmes both in Africa and the Near East that have proved effective to reach out to women clients. Sale agents can build a relationship of trust with their clients and combine the provision of inputs or technologies with on-the-spot training; this is particularly helpful for rural women whose opportunity for such interaction is limited. • Promote women's digital literacy and access to web-based services by working in synergy with service providers (public and private) and promoting gender-responsive infrastructure development.



Table 1 (Cont.)

	GBCs	Actions/strategies to address them
Skills and knowledge	Both in Africa and in the NENA region, rural women often lack the required technical, managerial and business skills to seize opportunities arising from agribusiness development. This is mainly due to their unequal access to higher education, vocational and specialized training, as well as their poorer access to business development and financial services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and strengthen women's technical, business and entrepreneurship skills through improved access to business development and financial services together with technical training. An IGRB aims to bridge the existing gap by providing accessible and affordable skills development opportunities to women in their various productive and entrepreneurial roles. For example, business service centres may be established as one of the services provided by cooperatives, to provide members with information, mentoring and business support, using a household approach/methodology, which allows outreach to both spouses as economic agents and decision-makers. Agribusiness incubators can also play a key role in providing women, and especially younger women, access to skills development, mentorship and business networks to help them establish and expand their businesses.



Table 1 (Cont.)

	GBCs	Actions/strategies to address them
Access to markets and employment opportunities	<p>In Africa, women have 25 percent less access to waged and salaried work, accounting for nearly 90 percent of informal labour (FAO, 2021). In addition, the wage-earning gap between women and men in rural Africa is estimated to be between 15–60 percent (ILO, 2019). Globally, NENA remains the region with the lowest rate of female participation in the labour force. Women are active in the agriculture sector but work mainly as unpaid contributing family members or are employed in seasonal and casual jobs, mostly in the informal sector.</p> <p>In SSA, women have a more prominent role as marketers and retailers, though they are often concentrated in small-scale operations in the informal sector. In the NENA region, men tend to dominate commercial operations, mainly due to rigid gender stereotypes and women's mobility constraints. Men typically control revenues from sales and the household income, even if women have contributed substantially to the production or transformation of the product.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure an explicit focus on women's working conditions and their direct market access. This could imply ensuring organizational policies and strategies that guarantee equal pay for equal work as well as providing additional services (such as childcare and facilities) to allow women to engage in paid work. • Engage the whole household in contractual arrangements, ensuring that women are aware of proposed conditions and that their productive role is recognized in the contract (e.g. in the case of contract farming with family farms or businesses). Illiterate, minority and older women may need companies to provide translation into local languages as well as creating an environment where they feel able to ask for clarifications, e.g. through female agents. Flexibility in arrangements should be discussed in advance, as the conditions proposed may not be a viable livelihood option for poorer women and may create further vulnerability for those who struggle to adapt or do not profit from flexibility. • Buy products from women's cooperatives or associations, which often prove more successful in increasing women's access to the services and resources required to improve the quality of their products as well as benefiting from larger and more stable markets (e.g. shared technologies or equipment; market price information; specialized training). Women's cooperatives can also make their traditional and often invisible role in agrifood value chains more professional or help them seize opportunities of unmet market and consumers' needs.



Table 1 (Cont.)

	GBCs	Actions/strategies to address them
Workloads	<p>As elsewhere, women in SSA and NENA shoulder most of the unpaid domestic and care work of households and communities, in addition to working as farmers, processors, traders and running small businesses. Rigid gender roles combined with lack of access to services, such as childcare, make it difficult for women to gain economic parity with men.</p> <p>Poor access to mechanization and labour-saving technologies negatively affects women's work burden as well as their value chain performance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the use of technologies and practices that contribute to reducing women's workload and time poverty, while improving their agricultural production and productivity (e.g. solar pumps, labour-saving processing technologies, etc.) Consider the provision of childcare services or partnerships with actors who can provide such services in combination with other agricultural goods and services (e.g. financial or business development). Women-led enterprises or cooperatives could also be supported to provide such services in rural areas, thus promoting a complementary type of IGRBs. Engage with smallholders and small-scale farmers through approaches that promote a fairer distribution of labour and care work between women and men in various contexts: home, farm, off-farm, and the community. In addition, advocate for gender-responsive public infrastructure such as childcare facilities, safe public roads, water supplies, electricity, and internet connectivity.
Voice and representation outside the home	<p>Equal representation and meaningful participation in decision-making and political processes is at the core of promoting human rights and democratic values. However, gender inequalities are still pervasive, affecting especially rural women. Despite progress over the last year, SSA has closed only 21.3% of the gender gap in political empowerment. At 15.2% of the gender gap closed, North Africa and the Middle East record the third lowest regional score in this index, according to the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report (WEF 2022)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen women's voice, participation and representation in decision-making across the board, including in income-generating groups, producer organizations, community bodies and stakeholder platforms. This may imply setting quotas or promoting a gender-responsive governance of these organizations through awareness raising and specific training. Equal participation and access to leadership positions should also be promoted internally by an IGRB, as an organizational policy or human resources strategy.



Table 1 (Cont.)

	GBCs	Actions/strategies to address them
Voice and decision-making, access and control over benefits	Both in SSA and in the NENA region, Women are likely to be disadvantaged compared with men when it comes to negotiating power and capacities. This is mainly due to existing social norms which limit women's access to information (including on their rights) and education and marginalize them in subsidiary roles, undermining their capacity and confidence to speak up and negotiate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen women's position at home and ensure they share in the benefits of their work, particularly at household level, fostering the adoption of gender-transformative and participatory approaches for training and service provision. These approaches guarantee attention to the root causes of gender inequality, working with men and boys to transform discriminatory social norms and traditional perceptions about women and girls' roles. They are applicable in the rural and agricultural contexts, as documented by FAO, IFAD and WFP (FAO, IFAD & WFP, 2020). Invest in building women's capacities along with those of women's organizations, collective bargaining power and access to information and financial services on an equal footing with men.
Well-being and quality of life	The unequal distribution of care and domestic work and weak control over financial resources means that women often lack the time and the means to take care of their own well-being. This is compounded by the lack of health and reproductive care services and poor infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving women's quality of life by working on norms and practices, engaging with men and boys, promoting positive behaviours and positive ideas of masculinity, providing health and reproductive health services and developing life skills. This is achievable in various ways, including through communication and marketing campaigns that promote a non-stereotyped language and a gender-transformative communication style.
Policy and institutional environment	Most countries in Africa and the Near East have put in place gender-sensitive policy and legal frameworks. However, gaps remain, including women's secure access to land, citizenship laws etc. Moreover, there is weak implementation and monitoring, as well as a lack of fiscal commitments, capacities and institutional arrangements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engaging in dialogue with governments and other stakeholders, including civil society, to create an enabling policy and institutional environment for gender equality and women's empowerment. This could include promoting gender-responsive legislative and policy reform, participation of women's organizations in policy dialogue, strengthening institutional mechanisms and gender capacity, including gender-responsive budgeting and raising public awareness.

Source: Bishop, C. 2017. *A tool for assessing the gender-responsiveness of agribusiness initiatives*. iBAN. (<https://www.inclusivebusiness.net/ib-voices/tool-assessing-gender-responsiveness-agribusiness-initiatives>)





What can be done to help establish IGRBs in agrifood systems?

There is now a vast array of initiatives that target more inclusive ways of doing business, driven variously by the private sector, donors, NGOs and international organizations. They include value chain development programmes, public/private partnerships, company sustainability initiatives, sector roundtables, knowledge networks and standard setting. This means there are potentially many opportunities for making these initiatives gender-responsive and promoting gender-responsiveness across the board.

Below are some action areas to support the establishment of IGRBM, to which various actors may contribute:

1. Advocate the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies and strategies in agriculture and beyond – in addition to policy and legal reform.

A conducive policy environment for IGRBs must ensure equal entitlements and access to productive assets and resources, including land, particularly for women and vulnerable groups, and promote women and men's equal rights, voice and participation. It must also safeguard compliance with decent employment and wage policies to promote gender equality, in adherence with international labour standards.

Broader and complementary measures should also be considered, such as ensuring access to civil documentation and registering and legalising micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME). In addition, provide adequate access to education and soft skills development, focusing on women, as well as creating partnerships with service providers to ensure capacity development on business management, supply chain management and access to finance for smallholders / MSME – taking into account GBCs.



FAO can play an important role in this space to raise awareness on and advocate for IGRBs and build the capacity, especially of government counterparts, to formulate policies and programmes that are gender-responsive and compliant with international standards. FAO can also promote inter and intra-regional sharing of experiences and learning.

2. Promote further research, testing, adoption and dissemination of tools and initiatives to put IGRBs into practice.

Evidence is still poor and scattered on lessons learnt from setting up and operating IBMs. There is even less for IGRBs, as evidenced by the research conducted for this paper. A more systematic collection of good practices that can be shared and replicated is required. For this to happen, clearer and agreed standards are needed to ensure that initiatives can be compared and measured. Analyses of the evidence would also help to prove the business case for inclusive and gender-responsive businesses and business models and highlight the trade-offs between gender-responsiveness, inclusion and business performance as well as environmental sustainability. Complementary efforts are also necessary to raise the level of awareness and promote these lessons, particularly to private sector companies and actors, but also to wider audiences.

Approaches and tools to identify GBCs – and formulate appropriate strategies to address and monitor them – are a crucial component of designing and implementing support programmes for IGRBs and helping businesses develop their models to be inclusive and gender-responsive. FAO could expand its work on gender-sensitive value chain development for testing and disseminating IGRBs approaches and tools that address specific gender-related constraints.

3. Pilot initiatives in selected countries and regions in Africa and the Near East that promote the adoption of IGRBs – or some key elements – to generate quantitative and qualitative evidence on IGRBM

FAO, together with other partners, should mainstream IGRBs concepts and develop tools and guidance that can be pilot tested in selected value chain and



agribusiness development projects/programmes to generate quantitative and qualitative evidence on IGRBs. Equally important is the formulation of effective scale-up strategies that promote the long-term sustainability and gender-responsiveness of these pilot initiatives, beyond the life span of projects/programmes and replicability across countries. As mentioned above, documenting and measuring the impacts of these pilots with gender-responsive metrics and M&R systems are extremely important.

Questions that could be answered through these pilots:

- How to build effective business relationships with large numbers of value chain actors, particularly small-scale producers and processors that are not formally organized, ensuring the significant involvement of women who can also benefit fully from their participation?
- What are the options for working efficiently, effectively, fairly and profitably with women and men in small-scale businesses and micro-enterprises, in terms of product aggregation, provision of input and financial services and adoption of commercially viable and sustainable farming practices that are gender-responsive? This implies the early identification and removal of GBCs.
- What is the evidence of commercial and social/gender ROI for different business models in different contexts? Is there a business case for gender-responsiveness?
- How to measure reach of impact, particularly at household level where many gender dynamics occur?
- How can the lessons learned influence the choices and decisions of others?

(Questions elaborated and adapted from Rappoldt, Sopov and Guijt, 2017)


4. Strengthening the capacities of international, continental and regional actors and stakeholders to play a relevant role in advancing IGRBs

It is necessary to increase the capacity of public and private sector actors to design and implement inclusive and innovative business models that reduce social, gender and economic inequality while ensuring profitability for the private sector and engaged local actors. Attention should be paid to models that promote the collaboration of a diverse set of actors and to strategies that support the



financial and economic sustainability and viability of social enterprises, women's cooperatives and women and youth-led small and medium enterprises (SME). FAO can play a supporting role, building on its efforts to develop gender awareness and the capacity of government counterparts and partners.





The importance of multi-stakeholder engagement and a holistic approach



As has already been emphasized, moving towards inclusive and gender-responsive business requires removing GBCs that still affect women and girls in SSA and NENA, limiting achievement of their full human and productive potential. These inequalities are mainly due to the pervasive persistence of patriarchal norms, social injustices and discrimination; their eradication therefore demands strategies that go beyond piecemeal and sectoral approaches and urges the collaboration and determination of all sectors of society.



Governments can provide incentives for gender-responsiveness and ensure that the legal and policy framework respects, protects and fulfils women's rights in compliance with international standards and conventions, including the removal of barriers, where these still exist. Development partners can play a coordinating and convening role and contribute to strengthening the enabling environment for IGRBs and women's empowerment. They can also support the growth of local initiatives to promote gender-responsive business development, including women-led enterprises and cooperatives, working with NGOs, grassroots organizations and companies.

For the private sector (including agribusinesses, SMEs and cooperatives), while maintaining the focus on competitiveness and economic viability, there is scope for devising win-win solutions that promote women's empowerment as the cornerstone of sustainability. Investors should include gender responsiveness and women's empowerment parameters to carry out portfolio analyses and assess potential business opportunities. This would require developing gender-responsive indicators for investment screening and increasing the internal gender awareness and capacity of staff.

Research needs to focus more on identifying lessons learned and examples of effective and ineffective approaches and the types of business model options that are gender-responsive and work inclusively with the different sectors in different contexts. Research efforts should also be built more systematically on robust gender and intersectional analyses that support the identification of GBCs and the social and gender norms that shape women's roles, rights and agency.

FAO's role as enabler is crucial to enhance collaboration among key stakeholders in SSA and NENA towards better understanding, dissemination and adoption of IGRBs in agrifood value chains. FAO is strategically positioned to play a key role in promoting IGRBs as well as piloting initiatives in SSA and the NENA region, either directly or through facilitating the adoption of IGRBM by key stakeholders.



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