



ETI Gender strategy

Gender equality as an enabler of workers' rights



Why gender equality?

“Women’s economic empowerment and gender equality are first and foremost about basic human rights... Empowering women economically is not only the “right thing” to do to honour the world’s commitments to human rights. It is also the “smart thing” to do for development, economic growth and business.”

– UN High Level Panel of Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE)

Over the past few decades, globalisation and increased trade flows have created employment opportunities for both men and women in the formal economy. For women, this has increased their access to paid work and in some cases sustained economic empowerment, particularly in regions where this was not the case. However, these opportunities have also widened the gender equality gap between men and women in the workplace.

Inequality and injustice based on gender can be seen in the type of work performed, to how workers are treated in the workplace, to the pay and benefits received for work. In terms of

numbers, women workers– across all tiers of the supply chain – are often the disadvantaged gender because of discriminatory sociocultural norms and attitudes which consider women’s work to be of lower status. Other genders including LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning) and others) can find it challenging to secure employment and find that their rights and needs are not covered by national legal frameworks or workplace policies. Making progress towards gender equality is thus critical to the achievement of decent work.

Within the global development agenda, gender equality is now firmly recognised as critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, with Goal 5 specifically focused on women’s empowerment. Likewise, the benefits to the business world of greater equality in the workplace are numerous including increased productivity, less staff turnover and a healthier work environment for all. More specifically for ETI, since gender inequality is a major impediment to ‘inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all’, empowering women workers is essential to achieving Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth.



Gender refers to the attributes, roles and opportunities that are associated with being women and men. These attributes roles and opportunities are socially constructed and women and men, and society at large learns them through socialisation processes. These ideas shape how society understands the value of women and men, and the kinds of characteristics and behaviours that are considered appropriate and desirable for them. Gender does not refer simply to women or men but also to the relationship between them. These social definitions are not fixed, and manifest differently in different contexts, and change over time.

Gender equality is an internationally recognised human right and refers to women and men having equal and equally respected rights, and equal access to resources and opportunities. It also means that society values women and men equally for their similarities and differences, and the diverse roles they play. It is as concerned with the situation of men as women. However, in many areas, including global supply chains, as it is women who face greater risks and vulnerabilities, it is often associated with a greater focus on women.

Gender equity refers to the process of ensuring fairness for women and men, and creating a level playing field for them. This goes beyond treating women and men equally, to actively compensating for the historical processes of discrimination which shape women's current economic, social and political disadvantages.

Gender equality as an enabler of workers' rights

Discriminatory and often patriarchal sociocultural behaviours and attitudes have resulted in increased vulnerability for women in the workplace and within their communities. As a result, women typically have lower access to education, productive resources, limited awareness of their rights and weaker social networks. This increases their vulnerability keeping them in lower paid jobs without adequate protections.

The majority of workers in ETI members' global supply chains are women; for many, these jobs offer a promise of economic independence and a better future for them and their families. However, the imbalance of power between a largely female workforce and male supervisors/managers means they are more vulnerable to labour rights violations including sexual harassment and violence.

Employers can also struggle to understand the challenges faced by women when planning work schedules. For example, changing orders at short notice might mean workers have to work overtime to meet deadlines. For women, travelling home from work late at night can increase threats to their physical safety. Working overtime also affects their unpaid care responsibilities. When suppliers are pressured into accepting lower prices, it puts

them under pressure to maintain high quality and productivity, with less financial resources. These can lead to workers not being paid fairly or being denied certain benefits. Given their position at the lower end of the supply chain, women workers are often the ones who suffer the consequences of such practices.

Women are also disproportionately represented among homeworkers, casual, seasonal or part-time workers and often do not have access to worker representation. Many unions that do represent women workers can be male dominated, and women themselves lack the understanding and confidence to engage with these platforms.

Without investment in gender equality and given widely prevalent cultural pressures on women to be subservient, the reality for millions of women workers around the world is poor and unsafe working conditions, wages that are not enough to make ends meet and limited opportunities to progress further up the career ladder. Achieving gender equality is therefore critical to enabling worker's rights. However, this is a long-term process that requires a focus on challenges and root causes, as well as multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Gender equality in supply chains - theory of change



ETI's Gender Strategy

For ETI, the imperative to drive gender equality in global supply chains is strongly featured in our 2020 Strategy.

At the overall impact level, we are working towards a world in which ***“women workers enjoy equal treatment with men in the workplace”*** (Strategic Pillar 1). This means supporting our members and other stakeholders to ensure that both women and men workers' rights are protected and respected, and that they have equal access to opportunities and to remedy when their rights are violated.

Under Pillar 2 of our Strategy we have committed to achieving ***“effective worker representation in ETI initiatives with demonstrable positive impacts for workers, especially women and marginalised groups.”*** As women constitute the majority of workers in our members' supply chains, and at least 50% of any other marginalised group, it is important that we focus on gender equality in worker representation.

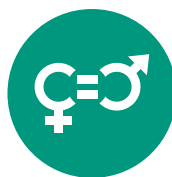
Our theory of change recognises five key actors that we can support and influence to make the push for gender equality in the workplace; workers (women and men); brands, retailers and suppliers; governments; trade unions; and civil society organisations. This is in line with the principle of a multi-stakeholder approach that harnesses and builds on the contributions of all groups.

Our vision:

Women and men workers across ETI members' supply chains enjoy equal rights and freedoms in the workplace and are empowered to access and benefit from opportunities at work.

To achieve this, we commit to the following strategic areas of work:

1. Build consensus on gender equality as an enabler of workers' rights



Across ETI membership, there are several ongoing gender initiatives in factories and farms that seek to address some of the issues faced by women in workplace. ETI conducted a gender analysis exercise with 10 corporate members in 2017 to gain a better understanding of what impact these initiatives are having on both men and women workers, and understand how sustainable, transferable and scalable these initiatives are. The overarching findings were despite the activities having some impact on women and men workers, they were rather addressing symptoms of the problems faced by women, as opposed to the root causes of inequality in the workplace. The activities were also found to be in need of a more strategic and rights-based approach.

Gender initiatives must thus go beyond teaching women and young girls to navigate precarious, exploitative and discriminatory forms of employment, and strive for changing employment systems such that women and men can equally benefit from them.

We therefore commit to...

- Make a credible business case for gender equality in the supply chain through sound evidence that demonstrates the positive benefits for both workers and businesses alike.
- Demonstrate the cross-cutting nature of gender equality as critical for achieving all the Base Code Standards, in addition to Base Code 7 on non-discrimination.
- Develop a repository of practical resources and material that enables members and non-members to implement initiatives and programmes that make progress towards gender equality in the workplace.

2. Pursue a range of strategies to enable ETI members address gender inequality in their supply chains



We recognise that achieving gender equality is a long term and complex process, which requires a focus on systemic issues and cannot be achieved by companies alone. We also acknowledge the diversity among companies in terms of resources and influence over working practices among suppliers, particularly at the lower tiers of their supply chains. However, we also seek to encourage a level of ambition appropriate to the centrality of gender equality for workers' rights and the global decent work agenda.

We therefore commit to...

- Support members to understand the root causes of gender inequality in their supply chains and develop strategies that address them by:
 - Providing practical support from the ETI Secretariat and developing appropriate tools and resource materials.
 - Supporting brands, retailers and suppliers to conduct gender-sensitive human rights due diligence, risk assessment and social audits.
 - Advocating for engagement with men as change agents across all levels, including male workers, managers, supervisors, policy makers, and community leaders.
 - Encouraging collaboration with civil society (ETI NGO members and local civil society groups in sourcing countries) to tackle discriminatory social norms that impact on workplace conditions.
- Encourage greater transparency from brands and retailers in relation to gender equitable policies and initiatives, collection of sex-disaggregated data, and impact of gender initiatives on women and men workers.

3. Ensure women workers are adequately represented



The most effective way for workers, men and women, to protect their rights and equality of treatment, is if they can join organisations such as trade unions which enable collective bargaining. This has benefits for both workers and business in terms productivity, fewer disruptions in the workplace, lower staff turnover and absenteeism, all of which are driven largely by positive industrial relations. However, given that women typically find themselves in vulnerable employment, they are often unaware of their rights to organise and voice their grievances over labour rights abuses. Trade unions can also be male dominated, making it difficult for women to participate or attain leadership roles. Women are therefore in need of structures that can support them to collectively speak out against gender inequalities at the workplace and represent their needs and interests to employers.

We therefore commit to...

- Support members to understand the benefits that accrue to the business when women workers have access to freedom of association, collective bargaining and worker representation.
- Build capacity of trade unions and worker representation to be more inclusive of women in dialogue and decision-making.
- Build women workers' awareness of the rights and capacity to defend them.

4. Implement gender-related advocacy work



Governments have a duty to protect and respect the rights of women in the workplace. However, in some cases, they may not have adequate laws in place or may have laws that are not effectively implemented. Many of the countries that ETI members source from are signatories to the ILO conventions on equal pay and discrimination, to CEDAW as well as numerous other national laws that protect the rights of women. But, there is still a gap in understanding of how states and businesses can work together to reduce incidences of business-related human rights abuses on women workers.

We therefore commit to...

- Collectively advocate for improvements in government legislation and policy to protect and promote women's rights in the workplace, where necessary, by drawing on ETI's tripartite structure and experience in establishing effective alliances.

5. Mainstream gender within ETI Secretariat



ETI's Gender Strategy sets out how we hope to contribute towards gender equality in the workplace. A key step in this journey is to develop our internal capacity to enable us support our members to promote gender equality in their supply chains. We thus need to bring gender consciously and proactively into the fore of our planning, programmes, and operations. Just as gender is priority in our members' supply chains, it also a priority for us internally.

We therefore commit to...

- Build internal staff capacity and understanding of gender issues in supply chains.
- Make gender equality a more explicit objective in our programmes by conducting gender analysis to inform design and implementation, and indicators to measure progress on gender outcomes.
- Review ETI internal processes and operations and develop unit action plans for mainstreaming gender across the organisation.

How will we measure progress?

The ETI Gender Strategy is fully aligned with our 2020 Strategy and we therefore aim to fulfil our commitments by 2020. We will put in place structures and mechanisms to deliver on these commitments in a timely manner, including sufficient human resources and internal capacity, as

well as develop appropriate indicators to measure our progress. As we move the discourse forward with our membership, we will continuously share the lessons learnt and good practice towards gender equality in global supply chains.

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The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is a leading alliance of companies, trade unions and NGOs that promotes respect for workers' rights around the globe. Our vision is a world where all workers are free from exploitation and discrimination, and enjoy conditions of freedom, security and equity.

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