

UNECE

Gender Responsive Standards



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Gender Responsive Standards



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ABSTRACT

This publication makes the case for mainstreaming gender in the development and implementation of standards. The first chapter places the discussion in the larger perspective of how standards contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030. It reviews the role of standards as a way of furthering equal participation by both genders in economic decision-making; as instruments for women's health, safety and well-being; and finally, as tools for sustainability reporting. The chapter also presents the UNECE "Gender Responsive Standards Initiative" as an important example of partnership among standards bodies, governments, the civil society, academia and other key stakeholders for gender equality.

The second chapter reviews a subset of standards, namely, voluntary sustainability Standards (VSS), as a common instrument used mostly by businesses to establish, incentivise and enforce commitments to sustainable development. The third chapter looks at how gender has been integrated into VSS, and the extent to which VSS have contributed to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The third chapter looks at another family of standards, namely, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, and discusses their impact on women. It then examines the extent to which gender issues play a role in the global governance of SPS measures and related capacity-building efforts. The chapter concludes by considering the policy implications for international trade institutions, donors and governments to ensure that SPS measures contribute to inclusive sustainable development.

The last chapter introduces recommendations for action directed to standards bodies, governments and donors and international organizations. It calls for all actors to thoroughly analyse the root causes of gender inequality and the impact it may have on standards development and implementation; to frame issues around global conventions and frameworks for women's rights; to act decisively by making a commitment to gender equality at the highest level of their organisation and integrate a gender perspective across all aspects of the standards system, in particular as concerns the needed support to producers and suppliers to apply standards in a gender sensitive way, and finally, to support the exchange of best practices at all levels and share emerging knowledge through a range of media and forums, so as to build momentum around gender-responsive standards.

Foreword

Multi-stakeholder dialogues and concerted actions on markets, in supply chains and within public institutions are of vital importance for the realization of the gender dimension of Agenda 2030 and the empowerment of women and girls. Voluntary standards provide an inclusive language that can be used by all actors and are a powerful tool that can sustain and further this broad cooperation effort.

A key forum for hosting this discussion is the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies which brings together policymakers and representatives of standards bodies and quality infrastructure institutions, alongside businesses, civil society and academia and other key stakeholders.

In 2016, the Working Party took on the new mandate of developing innovative approaches for mainstreaming gender in the development and implementation of standards. The work was entrusted to a dedicated group of experts: the “Gender Responsive Standards Initiative” which continues to meet bimonthly via electronic means to this date. The work of this group revealed that women’s representation in standards bodies was almost always below parity, and that there was no shared methodology to evaluate the gender implication of existing standards nor a methodology for developing new norms in a way that is fully gender-responsive.

This publication provides a large body of evidence to substantiate the work of this expert group. It reveals that if a focussed and concerted action is not started, standards will involuntarily replicate and amplify the bias against women that pervades the world of work. It also lists a series of recommendations for standards bodies, for policymakers and for businesses that seek to make the standards they develop and use responsive to the needs of all genders and to ensure that the standards development process they participate in is fully inclusive.

I recommend this publication to all stakeholders and invite interested parties to participate in the activities of the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative and of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, thus contributing to the global effort to make standards a vehicle for the realization of the aspirations and the fulfilment of the needs of women and girls worldwide.

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Abbreviations

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
ANSI	American National Standards Institute
ARSO	African Regional Standards Organization
B2B	Business to Business [standard]
BSR	Business for Social Responsibility
CAC	Codex Alimentarius Commission
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEN	Comité Européen de Normalisation
CENELEC	Comité Européen de Normalisation Électrotechnique
CLAC	Fair Trade Producer Network for LA and the Caribbean
CmiA	Cotton Made in Africa
COP	Annual Communication on Progress
COSA	Committee on Sustainable Agriculture
CPM	Commission of Phytosanitary Measures
EDGE	Economic Dividends for Gender Equality [Certification]
EIF	Enhanced Integrated Framework
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
ETI	Ethical Trading Initiative
ETSI	European Telecommunications Standards Institute
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FDA	Food and Drugs Administration
FiBL	Research Institute of Organic Agriculture
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point
IST	Icelandic Standards
IEC	International Electrotechnical Commission
IFOAM	International Federation for Organic Agricultural Movements

IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ISSO	International Standard-Setting Organization
IST	Icelandic Standards
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IWA	International Workshop Agreement
MRLs	Maximum Residue Levels
NEPC	Nigeria Export Promotion Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRI	Natural Resources Institute
PCIA	Partnership for Clean Indoor Air
OIE	World Organization for Animal Health
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
SAI	Social Accountability International
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPS	Sanitary and Phytosanitary
SSI	State of Sustainability Initiatives
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Computer Science
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNFSS	United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards
VSS	Voluntary sustainability standard
WEP	Women's Empowerment Principles

Introduction

The present volume is dedicated to an in-depth discussion of the contribution of standards to Agenda 2030 and specifically to Goal 5: “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”.

Agenda 2030, agreed by world leaders in 2015, is based on the conviction that the current growth model is inherently unsustainable, not only in its environmental dimension, but also in its societal and economic ones. In no uncertain terms, the Global Goals refute the notion that sustainability is an environmental agenda and reaffirm an integrated approach to development that encompasses all three dimensions of development. Agenda 2030 calls out for a universal engagement in translating the goals into action on the ground. All countries and all sectors of society are explicitly drawn into the implementation of the SDGs, including business, the civil society, philanthropic organizations, academia, the research community, the media and cultural institutions.

The gender dimension permeates Agenda 2030 and is reflected across numerous Sustainable Development Goals. Commencing with SDG 5, specifically devoted to gender equality, the call to action is also reflected in SDG 1 which highlights the fight against women’s poverty, SDG 3 that explicitly targets maternal mortality, and SDG 4 and 8 on access to quality education and employment opportunities for women and girls.¹

The centrality of women empowerment and gender equality for the achievement of the Global Goals should then be appreciated within this rich context. On the one hand, social equity is one of the three dimensions of sustainability, along with environmental sustainability and economic progress: hence gender equality is an overarching objective. On the other, only universal engagement can successfully move the Agenda forward – hence the importance of engaging women as actors of change.²

Sustainable development is deeply intertwined with this priority and this can be illustrated along three key dimensions. First, gender equality is a moral obligation. A society that calls itself just can only be based on the premise of aiming to eradicate all forms of discrimination. Representation of women in decision-making bodies, including standards bodies, is a necessary condition although not a sufficient means of ensuring that the interests of both genders are represented equally, thereby making it easier to identify and correct any practice that could potentially result in a worse and discriminatory impact on either gender.

Second, it is women around the world who disproportionately bear the burden of a lack of development opportunities, on the one hand, and of extreme environmental degradation and climate change, on the other. As entrepreneurs or waged workers, women face unique challenges in accessing credit and other key resources, and are denied professional development opportunities. And as members of households, women are – for example – often responsible for the collection and safe guarding of water and energy sources. When these key provisions become scarce, women are compelled to dedicate an even larger share of their time –at the expense of education, paid economic opportunities or leisure – to ensure their families are not lacking. For this reason, realizing economic

¹ See: United Nations (2015), particularly para 20 and targets: 1.4, 1.5, 3.1, 3.7, 4.5 and 4.a, 8.5.

² Ibidem, para 45.

opportunities and preserving our living planet will benefit women first, and standards are one important enabler for this transformation.³

Finally, Agenda 2030 is based on the notion that sustainable development is more than economic growth and that economic growth alone cannot be an adequate measure of well-being. In this perspective adequately accounting for all factors used in the production of goods and services is a key step. There is already a good understanding of the principle that natural resources must be costed at their true value to ensure that decision-making by individuals, businesses and collectives is sustainable. In the same way, a new awareness must arise concerning respect for social norms and specifically global conventions and frameworks for women's rights. This is an important priority to ensure that functions traditionally performed by women and linked to care, reproduction and regeneration are fully factored in the final cost of products and services. Standards can be used much further in this regard, by ensuring visibility and providing safeguards for the acquired rights of women and girls.

This publication opens with by providing a broad perspective on the challenges that standards bodies face, including as regards: the unequal gender representation in the technical committees that develop standards and in their governance structures; the lack of specific tools for the evaluation of the potential impact of standards women's health, safety, well-being and agency; and the insufficient focus on gender of sustainability reporting standards.

It then discusses how gender has been integrated into two very different families of standards: voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures. It also looks at the extent to which VSS and SPS have contributed to gender equality and the empowerment of women by enabling their participation in economic decision-making.

The volume concludes by outlining key lessons for standards systems and policy implications for international trade institutions, multilateral and bilateral donors, and governments to ensure that standards contribute to a fully inclusive and sustainable development model.

³ Almost 30% of the world's population still lacks access to safe drinking water. Women and girls are responsible for water collection in 80% of households without access to water on premises. In households that cook with solid fuels, girls spend on average 18 hours a week gathering fuel (House, Sarah, and al., 2014).

Chapter One: Standards for Gender Equality

Executive Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter sets out to discuss how voluntary standards – including norms developed at national, regional and international levels as well as sector-focussed and sustainability standards - can further gender equality and women’s empowerment as a key dimension of Agenda 2030. The analysis builds on existing literature, as well as on information that the author has collected through her role as convener of the “UNECE Gender Responsive Standards Initiative” (reviewed in Section 5). It is structured along three key roles standards play in policy-making, social and economic life.

The first part of the chapter looks at the role of standards as an instrument to enhance women’s participation in public decision-making. Standards are a key foundation for the policies and technologies that define our everyday lives and our common future, and for generating solutions to the challenges of sustainability and resilience. Taking stock of the insufficient representation of women in standards-setting activities, the chapter discusses the root causes of this long-term problem and presents initiatives underway to progress towards parity in representation in standards development and the governance of standards bodies.

The second part of the chapter presents evidence of the differential impact that standards and standards implementation have on the health and safety of women and men, and on the participation of women in productive economic activities as waged workers and entrepreneurs. Examples of gender-blind standards, leading to unintended effects on women across several domains are reviewed.

Recognizing that standards can actually be a tool for tilting the balance in favour of women, the section goes on to present success stories of standards that have proven effective in promoting greater gender equality and progressing towards inclusive decision-making in governing structures and management.

The third function of standards that the chapter reviews is as tools for recording, measuring and reporting. And as it is often said, what is not counted is not valued. Standards could usefully be put to further use for the priority of adequately valuing work traditionally carried out by women and related to care and households’ responsibilities. Standards for environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance reporting should be further developed to allow organizations of different kinds to recognise and support the redistribution of unpaid work.

The chapter concludes by advocating for a way forward that centres upon tailor made solutions, developed by policy-makers in collaboration with standards bodies and all societal stakeholders, including in particular UN Organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the business community, the financial community and the academia. It also calls for standards bodies to learn from one another’s experiences, even when their work is based on different business models and relates to different sectors and communities.

It is in this context that the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative launched by UNECE comes into play, as UNECE’s Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies has a universal mandate in promoting a

gendered approach to standardization. The Initiative is a collaborative platform that joins all stakeholders in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development and

implementation of standards and technical regulations towards the achievement of SDG 5 and, more broadly, the implementation of Agenda 2030.

1.1 Introduction: Standards as a Means of Reaching the Global Goals⁴

Voluntary, consensus standards developed by many organizations define the characteristics of the products and services we buy as consumers, of the equipment and infrastructure which our society relies on to function, and the processes that define our personal and professional lives. “established by consensus and approved by a recognized body, that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context”. As such, developing and implementing standards in a way that considers the gendered needs and aspirations of all people is a key step in moving towards the realization of SDG Goal 5 on “Gender Equality” and more broadly in implementing Agenda 2030.

This important affirmation needs to be understood in the broader framework and along the same three dimensions laid out in the introduction to this volume. This paper sheds light on each of them in the following paragraphs.

First, including women in the setting of the standards that define the fabric of our society and the technologies of the future must form part of the social dimension of Agenda 2030. While statistics on the participation of women in other important economic and political functions (i.e. the percentage of women managers and women Members of Parliament) are starting to be collected, allowing one measure of the progress towards parity in representation in economic and political life, data on women participating in standards-

setting and implementation is still almost completely lacking, as is a robust methodology for collecting it. Preliminary estimates based on data informally collected by participants in the UNECE Gender Responsive Standards Initiative put the figure of women participating in international standards bodies at about 25%, albeit with wide variations in the delegations from different countries and between the different organizations, with very little historical records and no established guidance or shared best practice on how to perform the data collection. This is an unacceptably low figure, even more so because standards – at least in some regulatory systems – play an important role in regulatory practice, so low representation in standards-setting may also translate into inadequate representation in rule-making, as well.

The second strand of the research looks at standards as tool for the realization of opportunities. Standards – anchored to well-functioning regulatory frameworks and with the support of quality infrastructure – can deliver on the priority of women’s empowerment and gender equality, for example by enabling them to enter professions that are traditionally male-dominated. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in standardization will contribute to ensure that the value of standards for sustainable development is fully realized. Indeed, standards are already an important tool for environmental preservation – thanks to standards such as those related to the

⁴ The author wishes to acknowledge valuable comments received from Sarah Mohan on an earlier draft of the current paper, initial research assistance by Rachel Wall and warmly thanks Judith Fessehaie for useful discussions and inputs throughout the project.

management of emissions and energy efficiency – and economic progress, where research shows they contribute to GDP growth and innovation. Currently however, standards’ contribution to women’s empowerment – as a key part of the social dimension of Agenda 2030 – has so far been mixed. The chapter argues that voluntary norms need to be embedded in a well-structured strategies and tailored interventions, so they can fully deliver as instruments for women empowerment.

The third role that the paper advocates for standards to focus on is for correctly measuring and valuing the multitude of roles women play in society, as an important contribution to the transition towards sustainable development. Sustainability reporting standards, in particular, may play a role as they allow organizations to better understand, manage, and be accountable for the impact of their decisions and activities on the communities where their plants and headquarters are based and for the common good.

1.2 Methodology, Scope and Objective of the Analysis

This first chapter aims to present a broad overview of the interlinkages between standards and gender equality, and identify issues that the international community and standards bodies can prioritize, in order to fully use the potential of voluntary standards for sustainable development and avoid any unintended discriminative impact on either gender.

It is based on a review of the existing literature, and on the extensive data collected and insight gained through the UNECE “Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative”, presented in detail in Section 5 of this chapter.

The scope of this chapter is purposefully very broad, covering any and all voluntary standards. This includes standards developed by international, regional, and national standards bodies with a large and comprehensive mandate, as well as norms emanating from organizations having a more narrow sectoral mandate. The discussion relates to standards with both direct and indirect implications for sustainable development, i.e. standards related to desired characteristics of products, processes, services equipment and installations as well as standards that have more explicit sustainability objectives. The reason behind the choice of a broad focus is

the conviction that all voluntary consensus-based standards have a crucial role in the realization of the Global Goals⁵.

For added clarity, the standards that this chapter reviews include all standards developed in accordance to the WTO Code of Good Practice or the ISEAL Code of Good Practice, which entail broad principles for the preparation, adoption and application of standards⁶. These include standards developed by national standardization bodies, regional standards bodies (such as CEN/CENELEC and ETSI in Europe, the African Regional Standards Organization (ARSO) etc.), by international standards bodies (such as IEC, ITU, ISO, Codex Alimentarius etc), by consortia (such as GRI, OASIS, etc), as well as so-called voluntary sustainability standards (i.e. those falling under the ISEAL umbrella among others).

The remainder of this first chapter is organized according to the three priorities spelled out above. Section 1.3 looks at the participation of women in the development of standards as an aspect of the realization of their fundamental rights, namely, their participation in private and public decision-making (Goal 5.5). Section 1.4 looks at standards as enablers, or inhibitors, of women’s participation in professional activities

⁵ UNECE has championed a large body of work aimed at promoting the use of standards in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. See UNECE (2018).

⁶ See: WTO (1995) and ISEAL (2014).

and of other dimensions of women's well-being, including their health and their safety. Section 1.5 looks at the potential of standards to become a tool for better decision-making that takes into account the impact of an organization's decision on overall societal well-being, and how that

could be informed by the priority of gender equality and women's empowerment. The following section presents in detail the UNECE initiative and the last introduces conclusions and recommendations.

1.3 Inclusion in Decision-Making: The Participation of Women in Standards-Setting Activities

The data on participation of women in standards-setting activities as well as in the secretariats of standards-setting bodies and in their governance bodies is extremely scant.

The pictures taken from some of the most important pages of the history of standardization illustrate how far from parity the standards community started off at its inception.

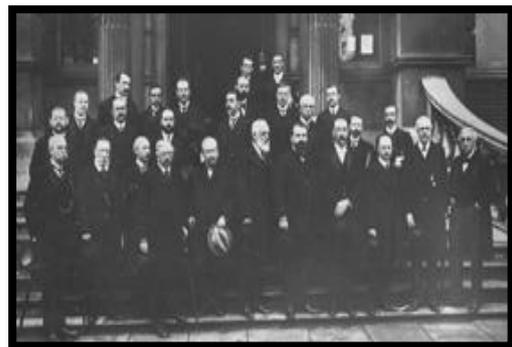
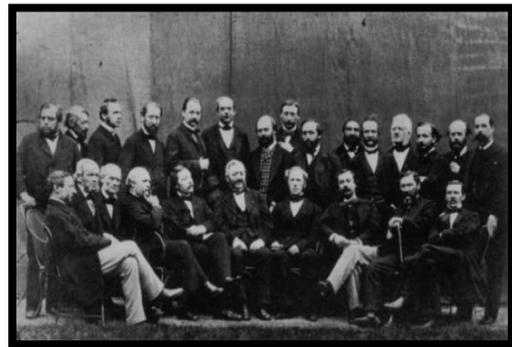
The first picture was taken in 1865 at the first meeting of what later became the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and was known at the time as the International Telegraph Union. There were no women present.

The second dates back to 1908, at the first meeting of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), with again no women present.

The last picture, and the only one in which a few women appear at all was taken in 1946 at the London meeting that was called to decide on the future of international standardization and led to the founding of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 1947.

Of course, contrasting these pictures with more recent ones would certainly reveal a more balanced participation: however, any person having attended technical committees' meetings will attest that gender parity in representation is still a distant goal.

A number of factors contribute to the low representation of women in these activities, at the time when the pictures were taken as well as today.



Among others: the fact that more men than women graduate from science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science (STEM disciplines) and the lower proportion of the women graduating from these programmes that find jobs in science and technology (as

opposed to positions in educational institutions or in other fields not related to STEM).

Clearly, the representation of women in standards development reflects their participation (or lack thereof) in the workplace and in wider societal decision-making. Delegates that participate in the technical committees that develop standards and in the national committees that oversee the organizations' diverse governance bodies are the expression of a plurality of organizations including: business, academia, the civil society, policy makers, which are, themselves, not necessarily gender-aware.

UNECE has informally surveyed some of the standards setting bodies to assess the current participation of women in their activities. Many organizations reported that they do not have disaggregated information on the gender breakdown of experts participating in their work. The IEC – as the international standards and conformity assessment body responsible for standardization related to all fields of electrotechnology⁷ – estimated that parity had been almost achieved within the central secretariat (60% of staff, and 50% of upper management were women). However, of the 45000 experts that contribute to the IEC activities, only about 5000 were women.

As regards ITU, including the ITU-T as the body responsible for standards for telecommunication the period, in 2017-2018, women represented 26% of delegates to ITU meetings overall, with women leading 6% of Study Groups as Chairs or Vice-Chairs. Within the Secretariat, 39% of women were in professional or higher positions in 2017, up from 33% in 2008.⁸

Another internationally recognized standards body that collects gender-disaggregated data is ASTM International, with a mandate to develop standards in a number of diverse fields i.e. metals, construction, petroleum, consumer products among others. About 21000 experts currently volunteer their time to the development of ASTM International standards, of which approximately 20% are women. As in other organizations, there were important variation in the participation of women across committees.⁹

With numbers so far below parity, it may be surprising that the standards community has done little so far to address the issue and correct a historical imbalance. This, however, can be at least in part explained by the fact that the experts who participate in the development of standards do so on behalf of their employers, who will select their representatives independently, so the secretariats of the standards bodies have little, if any, say in the composition of the delegations that come to their meetings. Still, apart from fulfilling a societally desirable objective, a more balanced participation would be primarily in the interest of the community itself. Participation of both sexes in any activity in equal number is documented to lead to improved team performance and ultimately a higher quality of end results, across all functions and all industries.¹⁰

Table 1 presents some of the initiatives by standards setting bodies of supporting balanced participation in standards development. Other initiatives, including among others the Gender Working Group for Sustainability Standards of the ISEAL Alliance are reviewed in Chapter 2 of this publication.

⁷ <https://www.iec.ch/>

⁸ <https://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/data/Pages/ie.aspx?/en/action/gender-equality/data/Pages/default.aspx>

⁹ Data collected by the author during the meetings of the UNECE Gender Responsive Standards Initiative.

¹⁰ See Sodexo (2018) which shows that entities with gender-balanced management had on average higher: a) employee engagement (by 14%), employee retention (by 8%) client retention (by 9%) safety records (by 12%) and operating margins (by 8%).

Table 1.1

Examples of actions to promote balanced representation in standards development

Standard	Action/process	Impact
ISO 26000 (a standard which offers guidance to organisations on social responsibility)	The process engaged six main stakeholder groups (industry, government, labour, consumers, NGOs and research and others), drawn from about 80 countries and international organisations, and aimed to strike a balance between male and female members.	Representation by women during the five-year process started with 33% in 2005 and was at a record high in 2009 with 42% women delegates.
International Workshop Agreement (IWA) on Cookstoves¹¹	The IWA started out from the premise that as women are the main end user of cook stoves, it was imperative to involve women in their design for their acceptance, popularity, awareness and long-term sustained use. The IWA involved more than 90 stakeholders from 23 countries.	Representation at the International Workshop was: 30% women and 70% men. Additionally, the percentage of women from developing countries on the total number of experts present at the workshop was 7%.
IEC “Young Professionals Programme”	A programme that aims at bringing on board a new generation of experts and future leaders.	In 2016, out of a total of 406 participants, 85 were female (or – 21%) while 321 were male (or 79%). Each year the group elects their YP leaders. Of the 21 YP leaders that were elected over the past editions, 7 were female (33%) and 14 were male (67%).
Reseau Normalisation et Francophonie “Femmes, jeunes et normalisation”	The project led to the establishment of national "Women, Youth and Normalization" cells. These cells work under the aegis of the national standards bodies give young women entrepreneurs access to awareness raising and training activities on standards and quality management.	The project is ongoing but has already established cells in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Madagascar and Senegal by 2019.

Source: Table compiled by the author on the basis of a variety of sources, including ISO News Archives (<https://www.iso.org/news/2011/03/Ref1408.html> and <http://www.pciaonline.org/files/ISO-IWA-Cookstoves.pdf>) and UNECE (2016)

To ensure inclusion of women’s interests in standard setting processes there is certainly not only a need to support the physical participation of women, but also to contribute to ensure that even in lower numbers, their voices are effectively heard and amplified. Due to a variety of societal and cultural factors, women may be perceived differently than men and hence be less impactful, especially when advocating for themselves. Accordingly, a very important initiative was pioneered by ITU on how to

support the negotiating skills of women involved in standards-setting activities.¹² Activities of this nature should be further developed.

It is also important to ensure that both women and men participating in standards-setting processes are adequately resourced to consider both the basic needs and the long-term motives of all genders in the area of standardization in which they operate. The further involvement of academia in the development of standards would be important to appropriately document

¹¹ The IWA on cookstove is a standard that defines tiers of performance for efficiency, emissions and safety of cookstoves. It was developed collaboratively by: The Partnership for Clean Indoor Air (PCIA), the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and ISO.

¹² <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/wise/Pages/WTSA-16-WISE-Workshop.aspx>

gender-specific constraints and goals so they can be appropriately channel into the development of standards. Another important means of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development of standards is that of involving

local women-led NGOs that can act to represent the interest of women. Their involvement may need to be appropriately supported by awareness-raising and capacity-building activities.

1.4 Impact of Standards on Women’s Agency and Well-Being

This section intends to show a large spectrum of experiences and outcomes relating to the interaction between standards and the empowerment of women in different dimensions of their lives. As the analysis shows, standards may be effective enablers or, on the contrary, become hindrances to women’s empowerment in different ways, in particular, as regards their health and safety, as well as their effective participation in economic activities as entrepreneurs and as waged workers.

In many cases, as will be shown below, standards have contributed to progress gender equality, in

particular when they were used and referenced in government schemes to ensure fairer wages, improved working conditions and a greater sharing and recognition of unpaid work (see Section 1.4.2) In other cases, however, the impact of standards that were intended to support women’s participation in the workforce appear to have had an unintended detrimental effect, in particular when they made it harder for entrepreneurs with limited agency and resources to satisfy demanding substantial and procedural requirements (see examples in Table 1.3).

1.4.1 Examples of Gender-Blind Standards

In reviewing unintended consequences of standards on women, a first large family is that of standards related to human morphology. Particular families of standards have long been based upon reference models specifically based on the anatomy of the average white male, and were found not to be sufficiently representative of outlier morphologies, especially individuals of smaller size, including women. While these reference models have in large part since been

revised, more research should be devoted to a better understanding of whether actual conformity assessment of products and equipment on the market are carried out in line with updated standards and fully take into account women’s specific needs. Table 1.2 presents examples of the impact that such gender-blind standards have had on women’s health and safety.

Table 1.2

Example of the Impact of Gender-Blind Standards and their Effects on Women’s Health and Safety

Domain	Standard	Criticality	Impact / Potential impact
Vehicle safety	Standards on safety belts.	Not representative for pregnant women who do not properly fit car seatbelts.	While these standards have since been revised, they were associated with risk of foetal death related to maternal trauma in motor vehicle crashes.

Earthmoving equipment used in construction and mining	Standard ISO 3411 on earthmoving operator dimensions to design the operator interface (seat, controls, cab size, access systems, etc.).	Previously not adapted to women operators, updated in 2007 to include female operators as comfort is key for the operator to be safe for a full day of work.	The revision of such standards contributes to opening up opportunities for women's participation in traditionally male-dominated sectors.
Standards for air-conditioning settings, used in offices and conference rooms	Standards characterizing office occupants - based on the resting metabolic rate of a 40-year-old man (since revised).	These standards overestimated the metabolic rate of women on average by 20 to 30 percent.	Energy savings, lower emissions, increased comfort for office workers.
Pharmaceutical	In 1993, the US Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) recommended separate analysis of men's and women's responses to drugs but substantial gaps still remain in the inclusion of women in clinical studies.	Males and females differ in response to drug treatment.	FDA suggests that women experience adverse reactions from pharmaceuticals more often than men, and that those adverse reactions are more serious in women.
Occupational exposure to chemicals and work injuries	Many different classes of Occupational Health and Safety standards i.e. BS OHSAS 18001- Occupational Health and Safety Management and ISO 45001 Global Health and Safety Management.	Risks of work injury may differ for men and women.	Understanding how gender and sex can influence the risk of work injury and return to work is key to developing effective injury prevention and workers' compensation policy.

Source: Table compiled by the author, based on own interviews and on "The World is Designed for Men: how bias is built into our daily lives" <https://medium.com/hh-design/the-world-is-designed-for-men-d06640654491> and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3644551/> Gender, sex, and occupational health <http://pwhs.ubc.ca/research/determinants-of-work-injury-and-illness/gender-sex-worker-injury-and-successful-return-to-work/>

Another family of standards that have unexpectedly resulted in undesirable outcomes for women's empowerment are those very norms that set out forbid practices that are harmful to women, discriminate against them, or downright negate their human rights. In most cases, these unintended outcomes occur in contexts where the division of labour is still highly gendered, and women are heavily discriminated against both as regards the wages they receive and the tasks that they are assigned to. While each case study depicts a country-

specific situation, a few common points can be identified across them. First, despite carrying out more strenuous, energy-demanding, time-consuming tasks and producing higher quality deliverables, women receive lower payments and bonuses relative to their male colleagues. Similarly, women are subject to poorer working conditions in terms of contract stability, working hours, career advancement, as well as associated social benefits, such as access to healthcare and parental leave.

In these situations, super-imposed standards may not result in the realization of the outcome that they were designed to attain, leading to an adverse impact upon the participation of women in economic activity. Even gender equality-related standards, that are meant to be conducive to women’s engagement in economic

and employment opportunities, when implemented without necessary accompanying measures, may lead to further exclusion of women from productive activities. Table 3 below illustrates this point, and further examples are also presented in Chapter 2 and 3 of this publication.

Table 1.3

Case studies Presenting Unintended Consequences of Standards on Women

Sector	Standard Type	Country	Synthesis	Source
Fresh Fruit	SPS and Quality	South Africa	In order to meet stringent supermarket standards, both for South African and European brands, producers incurred higher capital and input costs. Only larger, mostly male-owned, producing firms were able to meet rising costs resulting in the exclusion of female-owned firms from the value chain.	Barrientos, S. 2014
Fresh Fruit and Vegetables & Entrepreneurship	SPS and Quality	Multiple	Female entrepreneurs, who are concentrated in smaller firms and have limited access to resources, networks, and buyers, the study suggests that they tend to be less able to upgrade to comply with buyers’ standards, so they often are excluded from higher value-added export possibilities. Thus, these constraints not only limit women but hinder upgrading the horticulture industry overall."	Staritz, C and Reis, J. 2013
Fresh Fruits	Global GAP	Chile	Temporary, short term workers produce most fresh fruit for Chile's exports and over half of these workers are women. Chile's exports are certified through GLOBALGAP with 2,300 certified producers in the country. In order to meet GLOBALGAP SPS standards, pesticides are sprayed by workers. While labor standards regulating worker safety is also a part of GAP, these do not apply to temporary workers, the majority of which are women, who are responsible for spraying harmful pesticides.	Bain, C. 2010

Correcting these unintended outcomes, by designing standards and measures to accompany their implementation through a fully gender-responsive approach, needs to be higher

priority for the international community. Indeed, empowering women to participate in opportunities offered by e-commerce and international supply chains would be transformational, if their participation were to adhere to international global conventions and frameworks for women’s rights. Table 4 below shows case studies carried out in Senegal, India, Bangladesh and Mozambique which show conclusively that women who hold formal

employment outside of the home have had an increased voice in their household’s decisions and resource allocation. In other words, women economic empowerment – for example through participation in global value chains - results in non-economic benefits that are critical to the realization of the social dimension of Agenda 2030. Standards can play a much bigger role in realizing these opportunities.

Table 1.4
Correlation between Labour Force Participation and other Dimensions of Women’s Empowerment

Empowerment Indicator	Country	Analysis	Source
Children's primary school employment	Senegal	The growth of the horticulture export market in Senegal has increased wage labour among rural women. As a result, women's household bargaining power increased, and they were able to enrol their children in primary school at a higher rate than women who had no wage income.	Maertens &Verhofstadt (2013)
Control over household resources	Mozambique	Women who held wage employment had more control over household resources than those without wage employment. Over 80% of women earning wages participated in household resource allocation compared to 70% of women who did not earn wages.	World Bank (2014)
Agency over income	Bangladesh	Compared to women who worked informally inside or outside the home, women who work formally outside the home are more likely to retain income for their own use, choose their own clothes, invest in major assets, and have a savings account.	Kabeer, Mahmud, & Tasneem (2011)
Mobility	Bangladesh	Compared to women who worked informally inside or outside the home, women who work formally outside the home are more likely to visit a health facility or the market unaccompanied.	Kabeer, Mahmud, & Tasneem (2011)

Marriage and family planning decisions	India	As a result of an intervention providing wage labor opportunities, women aged 15 to 21 in treatment villages were 5-6% less likely to get married or give birth during a 3 year intervention period.	Jensen (2012)
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1.4.2 Case Studies of Standards for Gender Equality

Contrasting the experiences shared above, below are case studies of standards developed by national and international standards bodies, showing how standards can be catalysts of change for women’s empowerment and gender equality.

1.4.2.1 AFNOR’s Label Égalité et Label Diversité

A very early experience in the use of standards for gender equality relates to the certification labels on “Professional Equality” and “Diversity” that were successfully launched by the French Standardization Association (AFNOR) in the early 2000s and continue to be awarded to the present day.

The first label, created in 2004, is awarded to organisations and companies that have effectively implemented management practices aimed at promoting equality between men and women in the workplace. The label is presented following a certification process led by French standards agency AFNOR, and includes audits performed in several facilities of the candidate firms, and hearings held by each label’s joint commissions, whose members include representatives from the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Women’s Rights, experts, employer representatives and union delegates. (and are therefore referred to as state labels)

To be certified, organisations are evaluated against fifteen criteria, featuring, inter alia, equal pay, continuing vocational training, fight against the glass ceiling, work-life balance, and parental

leave conditions. Along the same lines, the Diversity Label (also a “state label”) was developed in 2008 with a view to enhancing organisations’ commitment to preventing discrimination, promoting equal opportunities, fostering diversity in human resources management, as well as ensuring unbiased recruitment and career development processes for its employees.

The label underscores assertive policies by companies in favour of gender equality in the workplace, particularly those aimed at: increasing the percentage of women in every aspect of the business, at combating sexism, sexual harassment and violence against women, and at applying equal opportunity principles and practices throughout their firms. The State label “égalité” has been awarded to many of the largest public administrations and private companies and covered about 1 million workers and agents according to recent data by AFNOR Certification. Certified entities included diverse industries i.e. transport, banking, insurance, retail, agribusiness, training, manufacturing, but as well as ministries, hospitals and utilities.¹³

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkJeDLztxlY&feature=youtu.be>

1.4.2.3 Iceland IST 85

The experience of Iceland relates to the monitoring and elimination of gender-based pay discrimination. The Icelandic parliament passed three regulations on this issue, in 1961, 1976 and 2008, however by its own estimates it fell short of achieving its objective with a gender pay gap estimated at 16.3 in 2016.¹⁴

In 2017, Iceland adopted a new strategy to tackle the issue building on the positive experience of the national standardisation body of Iceland, Icelandic Standards (IST), which had adopted the “Equal Wage Management System Standard” (IST 185:2012) in 2012. IST 185 was a certifiable system that could voluntarily be used by organizations of all kinds that intended to prove their progress towards equal pay and equal working conditions for men and women.

The standard is based on international management system standards (the familiar “plan – do – check – act” cycle), and gives guidance to organizations on each of the steps to be followed to: identify the different tasks and jobs, assess which jobs have equal value, check that against the salaries actually received by the staff, and develop policies for correcting any discrepancies as relevant.



Since 2012, many Icelandic organizations voluntarily gained certification. The new law passed by the Icelandic Parliament in 2017, now requires companies with 25 or more employees to implement the Equal Pay Standard and acquire certification, according to a staggered implementation plan: employers with 250 or more employees to be certified by 31 December 2018; employers with 150-249 employees by 31 December 2019; employers with 90-149 employees by 31 December 2020; and employers with 25-89 employees by 31 December 2021.¹⁵

1.4.2.4 The Gender Dimension of ISO 26000

Published in 2010, ISO 26000 defines social responsibility as the “responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment”, with sustainable development as its overarching objective. It makes sustainability a concept that is applicable to organizations of all kinds and of all sizes.

The standard covers the elimination of gender bias and promotion of gender parity, by guiding

organizations to act along the following six dimensions:

- Governing structure and management,
- Recruitment, job assignment, training, career opportunities, compensation and termination;
- Equal remuneration for work of equal value;
- Consideration of the possibly different impacts on men and women of health and safety practices;

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=sdg_05_20&plugin=1

¹⁵ Other countries have also taken legislative action to tackle the gender pay gap, however none of them appear to have used standards as part of their strategies
<https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/International-gender-reporting.pdf>

- Consideration of the needs of men and women in the organization's decisions (i.e. advertisement, procurement, etc);
- Benefits for both women and men from the organization's advocacy or philanthropic activities.

Looking at the standard now more than 9 years after its original publication lays bare an important drawback of the standard's approach, namely, that guidance on how to tackle discrimination based on gender through the above-mentioned dimensions is throughout the text conflated with discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, race, disability etc. While it is true that these issues often intersect, leading to instances of double discrimination, which would need to be addressed explicitly more broadly,

the standard lacks specific language on discrimination specifically related to gender.¹⁶

In 2017, ISO issued an "International Workshop Agreement" to help organizations that use management system standards in integrating social responsibility within those systems. Interestingly, gender was not mentioned in the document.¹⁷ Research on how management system standards impact upon gender roles within an organization would be of value, especially because the implementation of these norms can directly or indirectly alter staff's functions and activities, with a potential impact on gender equality, and involve consultation with stakeholders, which may require a gender sensitive process.

1.5 Standards as Instruments to Measure Sustainability

Another important function of standards is as tools for recording, measuring and reporting. And as it is often said, what is not counted is not valued. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the functions traditionally performed by women and linked to care, reproduction and regeneration are critical, yet most often unpaid and largely unmeasured. Standards could usefully be put to further use for this priority. An important reference in this regard are standards developed to facilitate environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance reporting.

Reporting standards are not intended to lay out the desired characteristics of products, or support organizations in developing or monitoring management processes. Instead,

they are developed to support uniformity of definitions and classifications across global accounting. Increasingly, corporations are asked to complement financial reporting with ESG performance reporting.

Standards developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), in particular, are widely used to report on a large range of ESG impacts and have been mapped against the SDGs - to facilitate corporate reporting against the Global Goals. Additionally, many organizations use GRI's Sustainability Reporting Guidelines to fulfil the requirements of the UN Global Compact, including the Annual Communication on Progress (COP).¹⁸ For large companies based in the European Union, reporting has become

¹⁶ Gender issues have – however - been covered in the training courses provided by ISO Capacity building on 26000 under: Human rights issues (equal opportunity, non-discrimination), Fair operating practices (promoting social responsibility in the value chain) and Consumer issues (information provided directly by the ISO Secretariat).

¹⁷ International Workshop Agreements are different from standards in that they do not follow the usual standards development process but result from agreement reached during an open workshop. They have a maximum lifespan of six years, after which they are withdrawn, or go through a different process for transformation into a standard or another deliverable.

¹⁸ 92% of the world's largest 250 corporations report on their sustainability performance. The prevalence of GRI standards is so marked that 74% of these reports is based on GRI Standards (see <https://www.globalreporting.org/standards>).

mandatory since 2017 following the implementation of the EU Directive (2014/95) on the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information¹⁹.

GRI standards embed the priority of gender equality in non-financial reporting: in particular gender is covered in 16 indicators within the GRI G4 Guidelines. One such indicator addressing gender parity is equal pay: 53% of G4 reports in the GRI Disclosure Database highlight information on Economic Inclusion (G4-LA13). To guide corporations in the disclosure of gender

related information in ESG reports, GRI published, in 2009, together with the International Finance Corporation, a practitioner’s guide to the priority of embedding gender in sustainability reporting.²⁰

Additionally, GRI standards have been mapped against the Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs). Drafted in 2010 in collaboration by UN Women and the UN Global Compact, the WEPs (see Table 5) have been endorsed by 1,900 business leaders to date.

Table 1.5

The 7 WEP Principles and the Corresponding Reporting Guidance

Inclusion Activity	GRI Performance Indicators
Training on gender inclusion for managers	G4-LA9 Average hours of training per year per employee by gender, and by employee category.
Quotas on women managers	G4-38: Report the composition of the highest governance body and its committees by gender.
	G4-LA12. Composition of governance bodies and breakdown of employees per employee category according to gender, age group, minority group membership, and other indicators of diversity.
Documenting & reducing pay gender gap	G4-LA13 Ratio of basic salary and remuneration of women to men by employee category, by significant locations of operation.
	G4-EC5 Ratios of standard entry level wage by gender to local minimum wage at significant locations of operations.
No tolerance on physical/verbal violence in the firm	G4-HR3. Total number of incidents of discrimination and corrective actions taken.
Support to the re-insertion of mothers	G4-LA3 Return to work and retention rates after parental leave, by gender.
Marketing messages	N/A
Using the firm’s competencies for women related CSR actions	Investment and procurement practices: promote economic inclusion by selecting suppliers owned by women.

In 2017, the UN Global Compact together with UN Women and IDB Invest launched the “WEPs Gender Gap Analysis Tool (WEPs Tool)”. This self-analysis tool helps corporates identify strengths, gaps and opportunities to improve gender equality and women’s empowerment in the

workplace and within the markets and communities they serve.

Based on data collected on the basis of the first 100 companies that took the self-assessment tool, the UN Global Compact and UN Women,

¹⁹ Directive 2014/95 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014.

²⁰ See GRI and IFC (2009)

together with Business for Social Responsibility and the Inter-American Development Bank, published the “Women's Empowerment Principles Global Trends Report 2018”, showing that overall implementation of the WEP was on average at just 26% almost ten years into their adoption and in spite of the efforts, in partnership by many organizations, to enhance the uptake of gender indicators in ESG reporting.

While the impact of the latest of these initiatives is only just starting to play out, more efforts are required to foster reporting of gender related indicators. Ultimately, the importance of gender in ESG reporting depends on the priority that a company's stakeholders place on it, as opposed to other dimensions of workers' well-being, contributions to societal demands, and environmental responsibility.

1.6 The UNECE Initiative on Gender-Responsive Standards

A practical way forward for standards bodies wishing to take a step towards making the standards they develop and the standards development process they follow gender responsive is to engage in dialogues with partners to identify challenges and devise common solutions. One such initiative was developed by UNECE.

In 2016, UNECE and its Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) launched the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative. The initiative aims to strengthen the use of standards and technical regulations as powerful tools to attain SDG 5 (Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls), integrate a gender lens in the development of both standards and technical regulations, as well as elaborate gender

indicators and criteria that could be used in standards development.

The initiative brings together a diverse working group composed of representatives from standardization bodies as well as experts on gender issues and women's empowerment, representative of regulatory bodies and policymakers, as well as NGOs, UN Organizations and members of the academic community. To facilitate engagement by a global community, the initiative meets bi-monthly by virtual means.²¹

The meetings allow participants to exchange information and best practice about successful approaches to gender-responsive standards development and implementation. The activities of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative culminated in the drafting of the Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards

²¹ Participating organizations include among others: international standards bodies: ASTM International, IEC, ISO, ITU, Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS). National and regional standards bodies: AFNOR, ARSO, BSI, Commonwealth Standards Network, CEN/CENELEC, Icelandic Standards, the Institute for Standardization of Moldova, the Swedish Standards Institute, Standards Council of Canada, Turkish Standards Institution. Representatives of Permanent Missions to UN and other international organizations in Geneva: France, Romania, Sweden and Pakistan. Governmental or semi-governmental bodies and regional and intergovernmental organizations: the Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel, the German National Metrology Institute, the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council of Ireland, WorkSafe New Zealand, the European Commission, the Eurasian Economic Commission. NGOs: ANEC, International Gender Champions, Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe, L'Association Réseau Normalisation et Francophonie, CRC4change, EDGE Certified Foundation, the Gender and Mine Action Programme (GMAP), the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA), Status of Women Canada. UN and other international organizations: UNDP, the International Trade Centre (ITC), UNAIDS, UNICEF, UN/WOMEN, the World Meteorological Organisation, WTO and the OSCE. Academic and research institutions: DRR Dynamics, Matej Bel University, Porto University and the KIT Royal Tropical Institute.

Development. The Declaration invites all standards bodies, whatever their business model and operations (national, regional, international, consortia based, etc) to pledge to make the standards they develop and the standards development process they use gender responsive. This will be achieved by: signing the Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development Declaration, creating and proactively implementing a gender action plan for their organization and tracking progress, collecting and sharing data, success stories and good practices.

The document contains an annex that outlines actions that national standards bodies can include in their gender action plan for gender responsive standards and standards development. It is for each organization to decide what they can / should include in their gender action plan. The list of actions is not exhaustive; it is intended simply to provide ideas and inspiration for gender action plans for standards development organizations of any type.

These plans will focus on selected priorities along three priorities:

- Working towards gender balanced / representative and inclusive standards development environments;
- Creating gender responsive standards;
- Creating gender responsive standards bodies.

The Declaration opened for signature in May 2019. At the time of writing, over 50 organizations had committed to sign on the opening date²².

The gender action plans that the organizations are presenting include commitments such as: collecting information on the percentage of women and men in the Technical Committees; identifying sectors in which women are in the minority, include gender equality and women's

empowerment in trainings for the secretaries and bureaux of the technical committees, and furthering the participation of NGOs representing the interests of women in the development of standards. Many signatory bodies have also committed to strengthen (or commence) their partnerships with local women-led NGOs so as to ensure that they are aware of, and empowered to participate in, the development of standards.

While it is too early to draw conclusions, and evaluate the impact of the declaration, it is undisputable that these commitments will contribute to bring in new talent in standardization, and expand the diversity of the professionals involved in these activities. This will enhance the quality of the final standards by making them more relevant to a wider audience. Also, enhanced partnerships with the civil society and academia, will be greatly beneficial to ensure that communities are more aware of what standards are, and how they can benefit all genders, as well as their role more generally in sustainable development.

Another example, from the Gender Action of IPQ, the standards body of Portugal, is that it has committed to partner with the national Commission for Equality in Labor and Employment, and the Icelandic Standardization body, for the elaboration of a Portuguese Standard on Equal Wages. Again, this will contribute to solve an entrenched problem that is not only socially unacceptable but also economically harmful.

It is worth noting that, in its early days, the Gender Responsive Standards initiative was met with skepticism and overt opposition by a part of the standards community, based on the view that standards are developed through an inclusive process, and are meant to respond to the needs of the largest number. While not disputing this assumption, it is important to recognize that standards bodies operate in a

²² The complete list of signatory bodies is made available at <https://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/tradewp6/thematic-areas/gender-responsive-standards-initiative/gender-responsive-standards-declaration.html>

world that is still largely gender blind. In this setting, explicit action for gender equality is needed so as not to replicate and expand an implicit gender bias that is pervasive in the world of work. The efforts of the WP.6 on this issue have by now started from to generate an echo that goes beyond the standards community.

As one example, in the context of the 8th Triennial Review of the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Canada has introduced a proposed for a Thematic Session on role of gender in development of standards and technical regulations, explicitly mentioning the UNECE initiative.

1.7 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This chapter's analysis confirms that gender equality is fundamental to the implementation of Agenda 2030, and that voluntary standards developed by consensus are valuable tools to translate the Global Goals into practical action. More specifically, case studies and existing literature show that standards of different kinds are needed to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Several policy conclusions and recommendations stand out.

Firstly, standards have a pervasive impact on our daily lives, from the infrastructure upon which we depend, to the technologies being developed to tackle the multiple challenges of sustainability. For this reason, equal participation by the two genders in the development of standards is an important dimension of SDG 5.5, on private and public decision-making. With current numbers much below parity, a first recommendation is for all stakeholders to join forces to work on the root causes of this longstanding imbalance, including by devising new strategies to increase the number of women enrolled in STEM subjects. Donors should also enhance their support for women's participation in the meetings of standards bodies, including enhancing women's negotiating skills and enabling them to progress towards positions of relevance in standards bodies governance.

A second conclusion is that when standards are not devised with a focus on the needs and aspirations of all genders, they may hinder women's engagement in the workforce,

negatively affect their health and safety in the workplace and in their daily lives, and further exclude them from opportunities for economic empowerment and participation in international trade and global value chains. This contrasts with the successful experience and the concrete beneficial impact of standards for gender equality and women's empowerment, proven via effective certification labels, equal wage programs, reporting systems, and initiatives developed by institutions from standards bodies, such as the French Standardization Association (AFNOR), Icelandic Standards, ISO, the Global Reporting Initiative and UNECE.

This leads to a second recommendation: that it is necessary for standards bodies, national governments and societal stakeholders to work in partnerships to devise solutions that are tailor made to localized and gendered needs.

A third recommendation is for standards bodies not to limit their cooperation to only those organizations that work based on a similar business model, geographical mandate, and/or sectoral focus but instead to reach out and learn from one another in tackling an issue that is cross-cutting and pervasive.

The analysis also points to the important role that reporting standards can play in tilting the balance in favour of gender-responsive investments. To ensure that this opportunity is fully realized, it is important to work towards the integration of gender in environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards that are at the basis of non-financial performance reporting.

A final recommendation from this first chapter is for all stakeholders to participate, and for donors to further resource, platforms that allow standards bodies to discuss, promote and implement cohesive and collaborative solutions towards gender responsive standards and

technical Regulations. The UNECE Initiative serves as one such a platform and the wide adoption of the Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development on its opening date promises to be an important basis for further cohesive action.

Chapter Two: Integrating a Gender Lens in Voluntary Sustainability Standards: Lessons Learned

Executive Summary of Chapter 2

Agenda 2030 envisages a key role for the private sector in achieving the SDGs. Over the past two decades, Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) have become a common instrument used by businesses, civil society organisations and, less often, governments to establish, incentivise and enforce private sector commitments to sustainable development. This chapter explores how gender has been integrated into VSS, and the extent to which VSS have contributed to gender equality and the empowerment of women (SDG 5), with the aim of capturing learning for standards systems more generally.

VSS specify requirements that producers and other supply chain actors are asked to meet in relation to a wide range of sustainability metrics, from respect for human rights to protection of the environment. They are applied in a growing number of countries and sectors, though are most common in agriculture and the garment and textile industry. Research indicates that VSS can help set the bar for minimum requirements in supply chains and fill gaps where government regulations are absent or poorly implemented. However, certain groups, such as poorer farmers and micro-entrepreneurs, are at risk of exclusion due to the requirements of VSS, and there are questions as to whether VSS are the right tool for dealing with complex social issues.

VSS are rarely designed with gender equality in mind, with over half having no reference to gender at all. Among those that do have some coverage of gender, there is considerable variation in how it is integrated in standards documents and in how this translates into practice. Key gender issues, such as land rights, unpaid care work and maternity rights, are often ignored, while others, such as sexual harassment,

may be dealt with in a cursory way. Overall, there is a marked absence of management systems for detecting and addressing gender issues. This may reflect inadequate representation of women and women's interests in VSS regulatory processes and in stakeholder organisations (including companies, producer organisations and trade unions), but there is insufficient data on this to draw conclusions.

In terms of results, the available evidence suggests that VSS have mostly had limited or no impact on gender equality, and have sometimes even deepened inequalities. This is largely due to a failure to take pre-existing gender inequalities into account, as well as assumptions that income and benefits channelled to male heads of household will trickle down evenly to women. This serves to reinforce the status quo in which men typically occupy a privileged position within households, communities and workplaces. In smallholder agriculture, for example, men often have greater control over the means of production (land, labour and capital) and are more likely to be members of producer organisations. This can exclude women from engaging in independent production for VSS-related markets, and means they may not benefit equally from their work on male-controlled farms – indeed, their workloads may be increased by the requirements of VSS. However, in some cases VSS have enabled women smallholders to access productive resources and training, and have led to more inclusive practices in producer organisations, resulting in improvements in their incomes and influence. This is usually where VSS have applied targeted measures such as gender equity workshops, hiring women extension officers, encouraging women's leadership, and requiring

women to be involved in marketing and sales activities.

On large scale farms, and in sectors such as textiles and garments, studies have found a number of improvements in working conditions brought about by VSS, including enforcement of minimum wage legislation, improved occupational health and safety, and reduced compulsory overtime. VSS have also sometimes led to the formalisation of employment, meaning secure jobs and access to social security and entitlements such as maternity leave. This can particularly benefit women as they are frequently found in temporary or informal work, while men tend to occupy more of the skilled, permanent positions. However, the reach of VSS rarely goes beyond the top tier of supply chains, leaving many women workers in precarious employment with poor working conditions. Furthermore, audits frequently fail to pick up on important gender issues, such as discrimination and sexual harassment. Such issues are sensitive and often hidden from view, reflecting imbalances of power and socio-cultural norms that men and women may have internalised or be reluctant to challenge. This can make them difficult to detect during audits.

Overall, there is some evidence that VSS have contributed to the achievement of SDG 5, but only under certain conditions, typically where women dominate the workforce or where VSS have taken measures to raise awareness of gender inequality and to extend benefits to women. Certain groups of women, such as women with land and workers higher up in supply chains, are more likely to benefit. VSS have mostly failed to address structural issues which underpin gender inequalities, including the unequal distribution of resources within households and communities, social norms and attitudes around the types of work men and women do, violence against women, and inadequate representation of women. In addition, VSS may do little to tackle market and supply chain dynamics, such as pressures to cut costs and last-minute changes to orders, which can undermine the ability of suppliers to make improvements.

On a more positive note, there is growing understanding in the VSS community of these weaknesses in the approach to gender, and some of the more well-established schemes have already taken steps to address this, including building internal capacity and leadership on gender, adding more specific clauses on gender to standards, and publishing resources and guidance on implementing standards in a gender-responsive way. The VSS membership organisation ISEAL Alliance has also formed a Gender Working Group for Sustainability Standards in partnership with Business for Social Responsibility (BSR) to enable continued learning and improvements. In addition, there are some new VSS which focus entirely on gender equality or women's empowerment, such as UNDP's Gender Equality Seal and the Women's Empowerment Principles promoted by UN Women and UN Global Compact.

Most of these initiatives are too recent to evaluate the impact, but they should help set the bar for gender-responsive standards. In doing so, it must be recognised that strengthening the content and auditing of standards is only the starting point, and that a top-down, compliance-based approach which creates barriers to market entry for suppliers in the most gender unequal contexts would only serve to marginalise the most disadvantaged women. Producers and suppliers need to be supported to tackle gender issues in a holistic way, addressing root causes through collaborative efforts and engagement with women, men and their communities. The extent to which this happens depends on how much time, money and leadership is invested in gender by VSS systems, which in turn depends on the interests of influential stakeholders, particularly market actors. Emphasising the links between gender inequality and business risk, and putting pressure on companies to respect women's rights throughout their supply chains, is one part of the solution. Ensuring women are represented with VSS governance and regulatory processes is another.

2.1 Introduction²³

Agenda 2030 envisages a key role for the private sector in achieving the SDGs.²⁴ The SDG Business Forum presents this as a ‘win-win’ opportunity for companies to “better manage their risks, anticipate consumer demand, build positions in growth markets, secure access to needed resources, and strengthen their supply chains, while moving the world towards a sustainable and inclusive development path”.²⁵ Over the past two decades, Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) have become a common instrument used by businesses, civil society organisations and (less often) governments to establish, incentivise and enforce private sector commitments to sustainable development. VSS constitute a voluntary form of regulation for business practices that works alongside mandatory public regulations, legislated for at national, regional or international levels. In theory, VSS reinforce or fill gaps in public regulation and enforcement, and help raise standards globally. Interrogating whether and how this has happened in practice, and identifying the connections to different

dimensions of the SDGs, is thus central to understanding and enhancing the contribution of business to Agenda 2030.

Against this background, this chapter explores whether a gender perspective has been integrated into the content and implementation of VSS, and the extent to which VSS have helped promote gender equality and the empowerment of women (SDG 5)²⁶. The purpose is to provide evidence-based analysis of the experience of VSS thus far in addressing gender issues, in order to make recommendations for strengthening both private and public standards. In doing so, the chapter seeks to answer the following policy research questions:

- What is the role of VSS in promoting opportunities and advancement for women in the economic, social and personal domains of their lives?
- Are VSS effective in supporting SDG 5 and other gender-related dimensions of Agenda 2030?

²³ The chapter draws on an earlier paper produced by the same authors for the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development’s (ICTSD) programme on Inclusive Economic Transformation, as part of a DFAT-funded project ‘New Thinking on Trade and Gender’. When ICTSD ceased operations in late 2018, DAI Global republished the paper as: Smith, S., Busiello, F., Taylor, G. and Jones, E. (2019), Voluntary Sustainability Standards and Gender Equality in Global Value Chains (2019), DAI Global LLC: Washington, USA, <https://dai-global-developments.com/uploads/VSS%20and%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20Global%20Value%20Chains%202019.pdf>. The author wishes to extend thanks to the ICTSD team involved, in particular Sarah Mohan and Judith Fessehaie, and external reviewer Magali Barraja from BSR. Thanks also go to Federica Busiello for research assistance support, and to the people and organisations who provided valuable insights during the research effort: Tim Aldred and David Finley (Fairtrade Foundation), Tsitsi Choruma (Fairtrade Africa), Joky Francois (UTZ Certified), Xiomara Paredes (Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers - CLAC), Norma Tregurtha (ISEAL), and Roos Van Os (WO=MEN).

²⁴ See UN Press release, 20 January 2016, citing UN General Secretary Ban-Ki Moon’s call on the business community to play their part in efforts to achieve the SDGs: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/01/world-of-business-must-play-part-in-achieving-sdgs-ban-says/>.

²⁵ Extracted from the Business Statement produced at the SDG Business Forum 2017, see: <https://iccwbo.org/media-wall/news-speeches/business-stepping-transformational-partnerships/>.

²⁶ Although this chapter refers primarily to women as a group, we do understand that other factors (e.g. sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, age, poverty etc.) intersect with gender, and each other, to exacerbate inequalities in the contexts VSS work in. We also understand that gender inequality can have negative effects for men and other genders. These are areas that will need to be explored further in the context of standards, but are mostly beyond the scope of this review.

- What is the nature of women’s participation in the VSS regulatory process, namely agenda-setting, negotiation of standards, implementation, monitoring and enforcement?
- Are there good practices in VSS which provide lessons for standards based on different governance models? How can gender be mainstreamed more effectively in standards?

The analysis draws on a literature review of peer-reviewed sources and publications by standards bodies, civil society and UN agencies, as well as a small number of key informant interviews and the experience of the authors in this field. The limited size and quality of the evidence base, including a bias towards consumer-facing sustainability standards in the export agricultural sector and a lack of depth to the gender analysis in many studies, means that the review mostly reflects the experience of a subset of well-established VSS. However, it is anticipated that lessons from these

VSS are relevant for other standards systems, both voluntary and mandatory, many of which have yet to embark on the process of analysing and addressing gender issues.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section two provides a background to VSS and the potential linkages between VSS and achievement of the SDGs, as well as their known limitations. Section 3 looks at how VSS are addressing gender, first in terms of the content, implementation and governance of standards, then in relation to the evidence on VSS impacts. Section 4 discusses what this tells us about the contribution of VSS to gender equality and women’s empowerment in the context of the SDGs, and what we can learn from this about good practice and effective governance of standards. The final section summarises the findings and makes recommendations for standards bodies, the business community and policy-makers.

2.2 Voluntary Sustainability Standards and Agenda 2030

2.2.1 What are Voluntary Sustainability Standards?

The UN Forum for Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) defines VSS as:

“...standards specifying requirements that producers, traders, manufacturers, retailers or service providers may be asked to meet, relating to a wide range of sustainability metrics, including respect for basic human rights, worker health and safety, environmental impacts, community relations, land-use planning and others” (UNFSS 2012).

Broadly speaking VSS are supposed to provide a market incentive for sustainable processes (UNFSS 2016). For producers and other businesses in supply chains compliance with a VSS may be required for market entry or it could be a route to premium prices, while for end buyers and brands it can secure consumer and investor

support and help manage risk and reputational damage from unsustainable practices.

VSS are developed by a range of actors, including companies, industry bodies, civil society organisations, public authorities, international agencies and multi-stakeholder initiatives. The standards development process of VSS organizations is markedly different from that of ISO and IEC. In the case of VSS, organizations participate in the standards development process directly, whereas in ISO and IEC they are represented formally by their respective national standards bodies. Additionally, national standards bodies have a right to vote and comment on draft IEC and ISO standards, while in

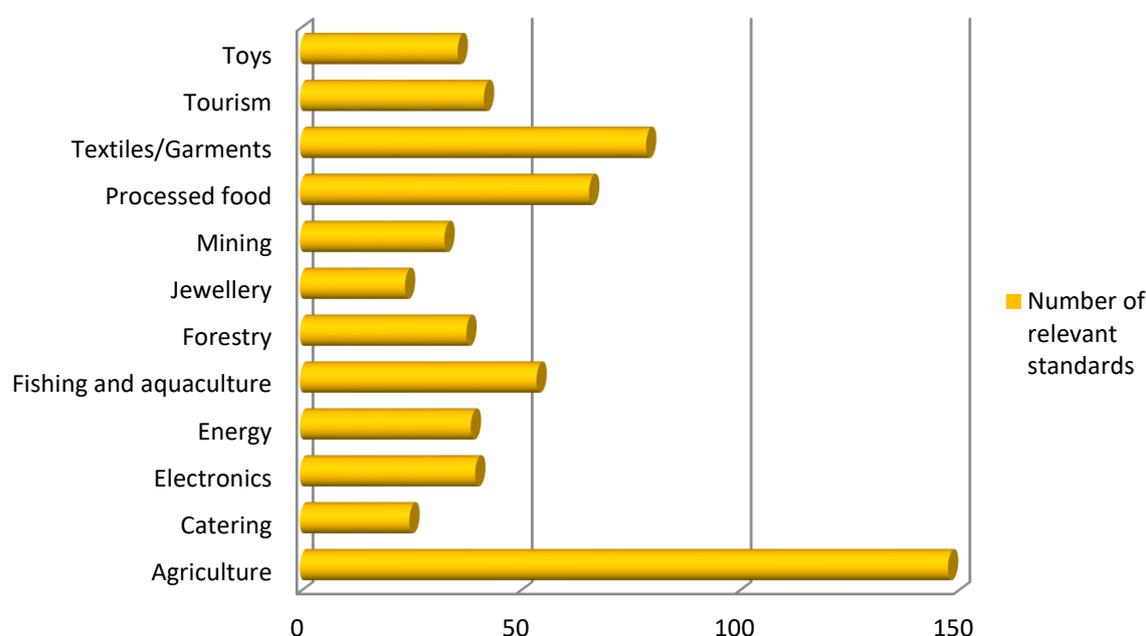
the case of VSS consensus is established also through an extensive public consultation phase.²⁷

VSS exhibit wide variation in terms of scope of application (geographies, sectors, supply chain nodes) and content (topics covered, technical details). They are implemented in more than 80 sectors and 180 countries (ITC, IISD and FiBL 2018), although they are most common in agriculture-related sectors – of the 255 sustainability standards in the International Trade Centre’s (ITC) Standards Map²⁸, 148 have some focus on agriculture. But they are increasingly

applied across a range of other goods and services, including catering, electronics, energy, fishing, forestry, mining, textiles and garments and tourism (see Figure 1). In agriculture and forestry, the cultivated area which is certified under 14 leading VSS schemes continues to grow (see Figure 2), and for products where VSS have been applied for longest, like coffee, cocoa and tea, between 13 per cent and 45 per cent of all cultivated area is now certified (ibid.).

Figure 2.1

Number of Sustainability Standards on ITC Standards Map, by Sector



Source: ITC Standards Map²⁹

VSS vary in their coverage of economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability, in accordance with their origins and purpose. For example, Fairtrade standards place a strong emphasis on trading relationships as well as the social and environmental conditions of

production, while the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) norms are centred around ecosystem management and chemical-free farming. There are also differences related to how standards are used: certification schemes like UTZ Certified and Rainforest Alliance

²⁷ https://www.isealalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource/2017-11/ISEAL_Standard_Setting_Code_v6_Dec_2014.pdf

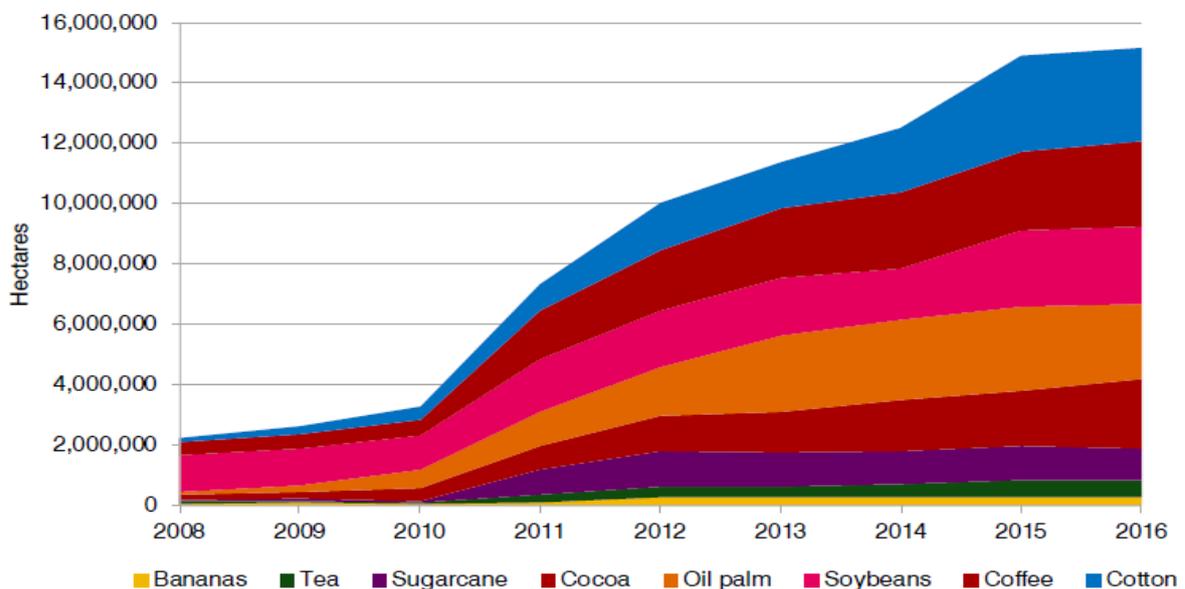
²⁸ As of 13 March 2019. The ITC Standards Map is available at: <https://sustainabilitymap.org/standard-identify>.

²⁹ Figure 1 is based on the classification of standards and sectors used in ITC’s Standards Map. Note that standards may apply to more than one sector, with 255 standards recorded on the Map in total.

involve independent accreditation of compliance with their standards, and labels which communicate to consumers that products are compliant; others are 'business-to-business' (B2B) standards which buyers require their suppliers to adhere to and for which compliance is assessed through a mix of self-reporting, checks by buyers and third party auditing. Governance models also vary, with some VSS owned by a company or a

civil society organisation and overseen by their boards, while others involve a range of stakeholders in governance. For example, the certification scheme for good agricultural practices GlobalGAP has equal numbers of retailers and producers on its board, while the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) has companies, NGOs and trade unions in all decision-making bodies.

Figure 2.2
Cultivated Area Certified by Sustainability Standards for Selected Products (Minimum Possible), 2008-2016



Source: *The State of Sustainable Markets 2018: Statistics and Emerging Trends (ITC, IISD and BiFL 2018)*

An important feature of VSS is that they often make reference to internationally agreed rights and principles, such as the International Bill of Human Rights and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, as well as requiring compliance with national laws. B2B standards are also increasingly linked to global reference frameworks for sustainable development and human rights, such as the UN's Global Compact and the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights. Furthermore, many of the most prominent VSS are members of ISEAL Alliance, which requires compliance with ISEAL's codes of good practice for setting standards, assessing compliance and measuring progress. As

such, there are multiple and constantly evolving relationships between the organisations involved in VSS and between national and international sustainability agendas. For the most part this appears to drive standards up.

At the same time, VSS are sometimes competing with each other for market space, especially when they operate in the same sectors and present similar offers to businesses and consumers, and this can affect the decisions made by VSS in relation to where to focus efforts and how much to invest (particularly since staying attractive to users often means keeping costs down). This also affects costs for producers, as

they often have to comply with multiple standards simultaneously in order to meet the requirements of different buyers and markets. Although there have been numerous efforts over the years to harmonize standards and minimise

costly duplication, for example by benchmarking standards against each other and establishing mutual recognition, this is still a problematic area.

2.2.2 Linkages between VSS and Agenda 2030

As suggested by the discussion so far, VSS and Agenda 2030 are connected on two fronts: first in terms of the purpose and content of VSS, and second, in relation to network and cooperation relationships between the organisations involved. In its 3rd flagship report, UNFSS mapped the requirements of a sample of 122 VSS from the ITC Standards Map against 10 of the SDGs (see Figure 3). The analysis revealed:

“...a significant potential to create institutional complementarities between VSS and the SDGs. In particular, in areas such as decent work (SDG 8), responsible production and consumption (SDG 12), and life on land (SDG 15), there are strong overlaps between the content of VSS and the SDG targets... whether VSS can be an effective implementation tool, especially with regard to the SDGs, very much depends on how the governments (and companies) pursue the system at national level.” (UNFSS 2018, page v)

The UNFSS report signals a lack of consensus around the potential for VSS to contribute to the SDG agenda, with some people of the view that ‘credible’ VSS can play an important role while others point to the limitations of VSS, as discussed in the next section. This debate is fuelled by insufficient data and empirical research on the impacts of VSS on sustainable development, including direct impacts on production and consumption practices and indirect impacts via facilitation of trade and economic growth, though this is gradually

changing. Several VSS organisations are starting to report on how standard-related activities and results are contributing to selected SDGs, and while most are primarily showcasing how existing activities and objectives are aligned with SDGs, some are using results data already collected as evidence of their contribution. Examples include Rainforest Alliance citing a growing body of evidence of impact on SDG 1 (no poverty) resulting from increased productivity and incomes among coffee and cocoa farmers (Newsom and Milder, 2018), and ISEAL Alliance (2017) summarising evidence of its members’ impacts on SDG 2 (sustainable agriculture), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDGs 6 and 7 (water and energy efficiency). Others have committed to collect and report on such data going forward, such as GlobalGAP which has committed to use its third party assured data on farming practices to report on farm contributions to the SDGs³⁰.

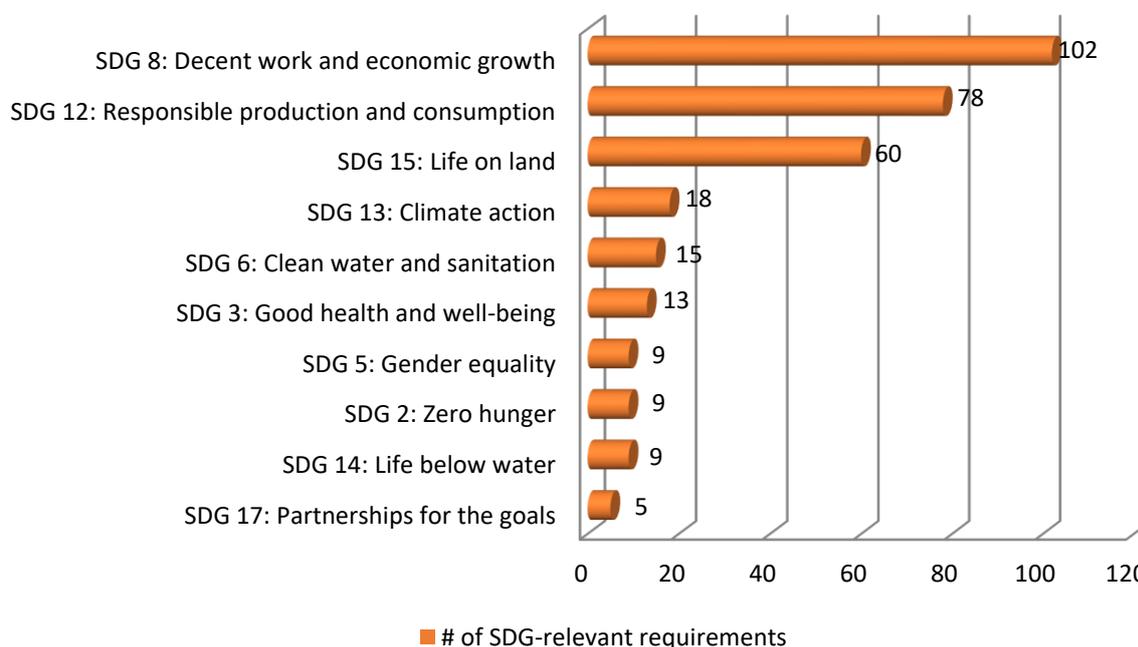
Likewise, many companies have publicised how their standards and wider sustainability and business activities align with the SDGs, and a proportion are providing evidence to back this up. Recent analysis of the corporate and sustainability reports of 729 companies found that 72 percent mentioned the SDGs, 50 percent identified priority SDGs and 23 percent disclosed meaningful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets related to the SDGs (Scott and McGill 2018). There are also various initiatives underway to support companies to align their sustainability strategies with the SDGs and to measure and manage their contribution³¹.

³⁰ See: https://www.globalgap.org/uk_en/what-we-do/un-sustainable-development-goals/.

³¹ One such example is the SDG Compass which has been developed by the UN Global Compact, World Business Council for Sustainable Development and Global Reporting Initiative: <https://sdgcompass.org/>.

Figure 2.3

Number of VSS Requirements which Relate to Selected SDGs (in a sample of 122 VSS)



Source: UNFSS 2018

More significantly, there is a growing body of independent research on VSS, particularly the most prominent schemes. There are also a small number of studies which explicitly evaluate linkages between VSS and the SDGs. For example, Sippl (2018) looked at two voluntary standards in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (Fairtrade International and the Alliance for Responsible Mining) and assessed their contribution to SDGs

using four conditions: goal alignment, rule strength, uptake patterns and indirect effects. She found that although programmes align well with the SDGs, there are challenges around uptake and implementation, including adoption of weaker versions of standards and exclusion of poorer miners. This is in line with other research on VSS which has found mixed results, as outlined below.

2.2.3 Achievements and limitations of VSS

VSS have been associated with the adoption of sustainability practices across a range of economic, social and environmental areas, from agricultural practices to community development, and from occupational health and safety to conservation and biodiversity (Petrokofsky and Jennings 2018). Research suggests that VSS can play a role in setting the bar for minimum requirements in supply chains and can help fill gaps where government and international regulations are absent or poorly implemented (Potts et al. 2014). They can also play a role in

advocating for investment in sustainability-related business practices (ibid.). For small-scale producers compliance may facilitate access to markets and in some cases premium prices (Chohin-Kuper and Kemmoun 2010), and the adoption process can improve long-term capacity to be competitive, including by introducing or reinforcing practices which make production more viable in the long term (Ruben and Zuniga 2011, Henson and Jaffee 2008). In addition to improvements in incomes and livelihoods, many farmers and workers have benefitted from

improved health and access to social services as a result of VSS (Molenaar et al. 2017, ITC 2012).

However, the available evidence also indicates that outcomes are complex, context dependent and not universally positive (Kaplinsky and Morris 2017a, Oya et al. 2018). Certain groups, particularly poorer farmers and micro-entrepreneurs, may be either excluded or disempowered by the requirements of VSS, leading to what has been termed the ‘sustainability standards paradox’: on the one hand VSS aim to promote sustainable and inclusive development, but on the other market forces push towards reliance on supply from those who are most able to provide compliant goods at lowest cost, and therefore already in a privileged position (Potts et al. 2014). There are also questions around the ability of VSS to deal with the root causes of social and environmental issues in supply chains, which often have deep-

seated and complex social, economic and political dimensions (Memkeen et al. 2017, Oya et al. 2018, Sexsmith 2017, Terstappen et al. 2012). This is sometimes exacerbated by the fact that compliance with sensitive and less tangible issues like discrimination, forced labour and freedom of association is challenging to detect through conventional auditing practices. Although many VSS systems now include support for producers and other supply chain actors to achieve compliance, and there is increased understanding of the need to collaborate to address systemic issues, the resources invested in this typically fall well short of what is needed to bring about transformative change. There are also concerns around the transparency and credibility of VSS, as they are both voluntary and unregulated, and there is a risk that the need to build markets and reputations compromises willingness to be honest about the achievements and failures of VSS.

2.3 VSS and Gender

2.3.1 Integration of a gender perspective in VSS requirements and procedures

We turn now to VSS and gender, where this generalised picture of mixed results also holds true. VSS are rarely designed with gender equality as a key aim, and more than half of the standards in ITC’s Standards Map do not cover gender issues at all.³² When gender is included, it is most often in relation to non-discrimination, which typically also applies to discrimination on grounds of race, religious belief, disability and so forth, which dilutes the focus. Reviews of some of the most common VSS schemes³³ have found that although they all require respect for equal rights, there are considerable differences in how gender is integrated in standards documents and in how

this translates into practice (KPMG 2013, Sexsmith 2017). Equal pay and equal access to employment and productive resources are more frequently covered, while other key gender issues are often ignored, including land rights, unpaid care work, maternity rights and representation (ibid., Tallontire et al. 2005, Lyon 2008). Furthermore, compliance criteria sometimes do not contain sufficient detail, such as going beyond the right to equal pay to stipulate equal pay for work of equal value, and including health-related provisions like gender-segregated toilets and adequate working arrangements for pregnant and breastfeeding women. Standards frequently

³² ITC’s Standards Map indicates that ‘gender issues’ are included in only 78 out of 255 standards (31 percent), although ‘discrimination at work’ is included in somewhat more (91 standards). Similarly, of the 122 VSS schemes which UNFSS reviewed, only 45 (37 percent) included at least one general principle addressing gender issues (UNFSS 2018).

³³ The schemes reviewed were: Fairtrade, UTZ Certified, Sustainable Agriculture Network/Rainforest Alliance, Common Code for the Coffee Community (4C), Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), Cotton made in Africa (CmiA), and International Federation for Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM).

also fail to address sexual harassment in a comprehensive way, including defining what constitutes harassment. Finally, although some VSS systems have adopted general principles and process requirements on gender, such as commitments to gender equality and disaggregation of data, and requirements for gender policies and gender impact and risk assessments, in general, there is a marked absence of management systems for detecting and addressing gender issues, including for collecting gender disaggregated data and processing complaints.

Inadequate attention to gender in VSS could be related to a lack of representation of women in VSS regulatory processes, including agenda setting and development of standards, policies and strategies. This has been suggested in relation to standards generally (UNECE 2017), but there is a lack of data on VSS regulatory processes from which to draw conclusions. ISEAL's 'Code of Good Practice for Setting Social and Environmental Standards'³⁴ requires identification of, and consultation with, stakeholders, and recommends that VSS organisations take steps to proactively seek the contributions of groups that are not adequately represented, though it does not provide guidance on categories of stakeholders that may be at risk of exclusion, including women. Analysis of 16 leading VSS found that the vast majority have multi-stakeholder representation and engage in consultations when developing standards, albeit with better representation of downstream businesses than producers or civil society

organisations (Potts et al. 2014). The wider literature on gender inequality makes clear that the under-representation of women at senior levels of companies, producer organisations and worker organisations is a systemic problem, and one key informant commented that unless specific efforts are made to include women's perspectives, gender is likely to be a blind spot in consultation processes³⁵. It is perhaps revealing that just 2 of the 16 VSS reviewed included criteria to promote the inclusion of women in management and boards at producer level.

This somewhat gloomy picture is, however, changing. A number of initiatives have emerged in recent years which have either placed more emphasis on gender issues in existing VSS, or which represent new women-centred schemes. This has been motivated by growing pressure to make progress on gender issues in both national and international spaces, including as part of Agenda 2030 and in relation to social movements like #metoo and #timesup. It has also been influenced by claims about the economic gains that can be reaped by companies and countries through promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment.³⁶ For example, Table 2.1 shows some of the steps recently taken by a number of VSS systems to strengthen their approaches to gender, such as publishing guidance and resources on gender-responsive standards and auditing practices, adding gender-specific requirements to standards, developing gender strategies and internal capacity on gender, and implementing gender-focused projects.³⁷

³⁴ See: https://www.isealliance.org/sites/default/files/resource/2017-11/ISEAL_Standard_Setting_Code_v6_Dec_2014.pdf

³⁵ Another key informant who is a gender specialist in a VSS scheme said she always reviews draft standards and other policy documents through a gender lens.

³⁶ An example of this is the World Bank's 'smart economics' approach which positions gender inequality as inefficient and women's economic empowerment as a route to economic growth, see: <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/GAPNov2.pdf>. McKinsey Global Institute's estimate that advancing women's equality could add \$12 trillion to global growth is another example: https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Employment%20and%20Growth/How%20advancing%20womens%20equality%20can%20add%2012%20trillion%20to%20global%20growth/MGI%20Power%20of%20parity_Full%20report_September%202015.ashx.

³⁷ Table 1 is based on a review of publicly available materials in the case of most VSS, but for ETI, Fairtrade, ISEAL Alliance and UTZ Certified it also draws on key informant interviews and the authors' knowledge of the schemes.

Table 2.1

Measures taken by VSS to Strengthen their Approach to Gender

Description of measures taken	Relevant VSS systems*
Reviewed and strengthened standards to include more specific clauses and compliance criteria related to gender	Ethical Toy Programme, Fairtrade, Responsible Jewellery Council
Published guidance and resources on gender issues and/or on how to implement and assess compliance with VSS requirements in a gender-responsive way	ETI, FLA, ISEAL Alliance, SAN/Rainforest Alliance, SAI, UTZ Certified
Conducted gender-focused research and/or strengthened monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress on gender	Fairtrade, ISEAL Alliance
Hired gender specialists, developed gender strategies and/or carried out internal gender audits, awareness raising and capacity building	ETI, Fairtrade, ISEAL Alliance, UTZ Certified
Implementing projects and/or provided technical assistance to address gender issues in supplier countries	ETI, Fairtrade, FLA, Rainforest Alliance, UTZ Certified

Source: The authors. *This is not an exhaustive list, as it was based on publicly available materials and a limited number of interviews with VSS.

In the past two years Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), a non-profit membership organisation working with over 250 companies globally, has published guidance on how to make standards and auditing of workplace practices more gender-responsive³⁸. It has also been engaging with member companies as well as VSS to help them integrate gender considerations into their management practices. In 2018 BSR and ISEAL Alliance jointly launched a Gender Working Group for Sustainability Standards³⁹ which brings together standards systems with other multi-stakeholder initiatives working in the apparel and textile sector. The aim is to jointly develop and promote strategies, tools and systems for integrating gender perspectives and to tackle systemic gender inequalities. This is a significant institutional development in relation to VSS and

gender, but at the timing of writing it is too early to gauge what impact it will have.

Also significant is the development of women-centred voluntary standards. One example is the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP)⁴⁰ launched by UN Women and UN Global Compact in 2010 to offer practical guidance to business on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. Over 1,800 CEOs have signed the WEP CEO Statement of Support and have committed to adopting the seven principles⁴¹ in their businesses. Using a WEP gender gap analysis tool, companies are enabled to review existing policies and practices and to establish new ones based on examples of good practices from around the world. Analysis of data collected through the tool indicates that performance against the KPIs is still quite weak

³⁸ See: https://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_Gender_Equality_in_Codes_of_Conduct_Guidance.pdf and <https://www.bsr.org/en/our-insights/report-view/gender-equality-in-social-auditing-guidance>.

³⁹ See: <https://www.isealalliance.org/about-iseal/our-work/gender-working-group-sustainability-standards>

⁴⁰ See: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2011/10/women-s-empowerment-principles-equality-means-business>

⁴¹ In brief, the Principles are: leadership promotes gender equality; equal opportunities, inclusion and non discrimination; health, safety and freedom from violence; education and training; enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices; community leadership and engagement; transparency, measurement and reporting.

overall⁴², and as well as being a self-reporting system (which tends to introduce bias) there is apparently no enforcement mechanism to push signatories to go further. Nevertheless, the WEPs are useful in the sense that they provide a benchmark for businesses and raise awareness around good practice.

A second example from the UN system is UNDP's Gender Equality Seal which is a certification scheme used to incentivise public and private entities to mainstream gender and achieve gender equality in workplaces⁴³. Over 600 companies in 14 countries have apparently been certified since 2009, as well as an unknown number of government and UNDP offices, each gaining a bronze, silver or gold award depending on an independent assessment of their

commitment to gender equality. Along the same lines, EDGE (Economic Dividends for Gender Equality) Certification offers firms a way to work towards and gain certification as equal opportunity employers. Like the Gender Equality Seal, EDGE provides support to companies to enable them to meet certification requirements, and is reportedly working with around 200 organisations in 50 countries and 23 industries.⁴⁴ There are no publicly available data to assess how much change these certification schemes have brought about for women and the companies they work for, and whether the incentives for companies are sufficiently large to enable the schemes to scale up, but they represent an important innovation in the VSS model from a gender perspective.

Case Study 2.1: Establishing Strategies, Structures and Capacities for Promoting Gender Equality

The Fair Trade Producer Network for Latin America and the Caribbean (CLAC) is one of three producer networks which form part of the governance structure of Fairtrade International. CLAC has developed a gender policy which sets out its commitment and strategies for gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women. It has also established a Commission for Gender and Youth Inclusion within its Board of Directors, to provide support and guidance to operational staff and to encourage inclusive practices throughout its network of producer organisations. A core activity has been leadership training for women to enable them to play an active role in their organisations.

Source: <http://clac-comerciojusto.org/lineas-de-trabajo/ejes-trasversales/genero/>

2.3.2 Gender-related impacts of VSS

Research on VSS indicates that, in general, they have not paid enough attention to, or meaningfully impacted, crucial areas of sustainability that are required to effectively address poverty and inequality in the long-term (NRI 2013, Molenaar et al. 2013). When it comes to gender inequality specifically, the available evidence suggests that VSS often have limited or no impact, and can even exacerbate inequality (Terstappen et al. 2012, Smith 2013). This is largely due to a failure to take pre-existing gender inequalities and risks into account, as well as

assumptions that income and benefits channelled to male heads of household will trickle down evenly to women and other household members. This serves to reinforce the status quo in which men typically occupy a privileged position within households, communities and workplaces, and can decide how to distribute resources according to their own needs and priorities. However, there are exceptions and nuances to this generalised picture, and some studies find VSS are associated

⁴² WEP Global Trends Report 2018, see:

https://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/publications/2018/WEPs_Trends_Report_2018.pdf

⁴³ See: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/articles/gender-equality-seal-incentives-private-and-public-enterprises>

⁴⁴ See: <http://edge-cert.org/>

with a range of positive economic and social outcomes for women, as explored below.

Most of the available evidence comes from studies on VSS in the context of smallholder agriculture, where significant and persistent gender inequalities are well documented and linked closely to men's dominance of land and other agricultural assets (FAO 2011). Land is the basic resource required for farming and a route to wealth, status and power in many societies. In all regions of the world, the vast majority of land is owned, rented or allocated to men (*ibid.*). Even when women are providing much of the agricultural labour, they are commonly seen as contributing family workers rather than farmers in their own right. If a woman seeks to farm independently, she may have difficulties acquiring or renting land of a decent size and quality, as well as difficulties accessing labour and other productive resources and services. She may also face disapproval from members of her family or community, and doubts regarding her skills and abilities, as well as expectations that she takes on most unpaid care work in the household which limits the time she has available for productive activities. Given this situation, women are less likely than men to be members of producer organisations, which are generally reserved for those who own or manage land, or to be in positions of responsibility within those organisations. They are also less likely to be contract farmers in outgrower schemes⁴⁵.

These inequalities can exclude women from more lucrative opportunities within the agricultural sector, including engaging in VSS-compliant production for high value markets, since VSS

schemes usually require farmers to be organised in some way in order to be able to communicate the requirements of standards, deliver training and other support, and monitor performance. Women are also less able to afford, or have access to financial services to pay for, the additional costs associated with compliance with standards (COSA 2013, Farnworth and Hutchings 2009, in Sexsmith 2017). In addition, training is often delivered only to landholders, on the assumption that knowledge will be transferred to other people who work the land, which is not always the case (Bolwig and Odeke 2007, Farnworth and Goodman 2006, in Sexsmith 2017). As such, there are structural and institutional barriers to VSS reaching women farmers which also serve to undermine progress towards sustainable production practices.

Various studies have shown that land tenure is crucial for gaining access to the benefits of VSS in agriculture, and that women are marginalised as a result of their lack of access to land (Sexsmith 2017). Although research in Mexico and Central America found that organic certification has in some instances led to women gaining land titles, this is a result of a procedural requirement that farm-owners be present during audits, which has led some men who have migrated to transfer land titles to their wives; it is not a measure taken specifically to reduce gender inequality (Lyon 2010). There are isolated examples of projects or certified cooperatives which have supported women to access land or other agricultural assets (see Case Study 2). But there are no known examples of VSS tackling women's statutory and customary land rights in a systematic way.

Case Study 2.2: Facilitating Women's Ownership of Coffee in Kenya

Fairtrade Africa, in partnership with Fairtrade Foundation (UK) and Solidaridad, has been working with certified coffee cooperatives in Kenya to set up women-only associations and to encourage men to transfer ownership of some of their coffee bushes to wives and daughters. This has enabled more women to register as cooperative members, open bank accounts and be paid directly for their coffee. Women have received training on good agricultural practices to increase coffee quality and yields, and the project has supported the adoption and construction of domestic biogas units to reduce reliance on

⁴⁵ An outgrower scheme is one in which a lead farmer or buyer works with a group of smallholder farmers to produce crops or livestock according to specific market requirements.

charcoal and firewood, which has freed up women's time as well as having positive effects on the environment. The women's associations are using the proceeds from coffee to invest in additional economic activities, including a poultry project and a commercial maize mill.

Source: <https://www.fairtradeafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Growing-women-in-coffee1.pdf>

A more common approach (among leading schemes) is for VSS to have specific requirements or to undertake measures to foster women's participation and leadership in producer organisations, to increase their access to credit, training and agricultural inputs, and to enable them to have greater influence over productive resources and household income. A number of studies indicate that when VSS purposefully include participation of women in production, marketing and sales activities, gender inequalities within households decrease (Sexsmith 2017). A study of certified and non-certified coffee farms⁴⁶ in Uganda attributed improvements in women's control over household decision-making to VSS activities such as gender equity workshops, hiring women extension officers, encouraging women's leadership, and requiring both spouses to be present for payments (Chiputwa and Qaim 2016). Positive impacts have also been reported when women's participation in training is a VSS requirement (KIT, AgriProFocus and IIRR 2012 and Bolwig and Odeke 2007, in Sexsmith 2017). Likewise, a clause in the Fairtrade standard for cotton farmers requiring women to be paid directly for their cotton was associated with increased membership of cooperatives and improved revenues among women in West Africa (Nelson and Smith 2011). In the Kenyan tea sector Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance certifications have also been linked to improvements in women's representation in producer organisation committees and their involvement in decision-making regarding bonus payments for tea (NRI 2013).

However, other studies have found that women's membership of certified organisations remains low and largely unaffected by VSS (Sexsmith 2017). A study of 6 Fairtrade certified

cooperatives in the Dominican Republic banana sector, India cotton sector and Kenyan tea sector found women represented between 5 percent and 23 percent of members, and even lower percentages among leaders and professional staff (Fairtrade Foundation 2015, see Figure 4). Barriers to women's participation included the rules, structures and practices of producer organisations; socio-cultural norms and attitudes related to the roles of men and women in society; and women's personal circumstances and choices, with male dominance of cooperatives sometimes creating disincentives for women to get involved even when they have the opportunity to do so. Overall, VSS have had variable impact on women's leadership and influence on decision-making within producer organisations, with indications that more progress may be made where women's or gender committees are set up as it gives women a space in which to collectively articulate their interests (Riisgaard et al. 2009 in Sexsmith 2017, Verstappen et al. 2012, Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2014).

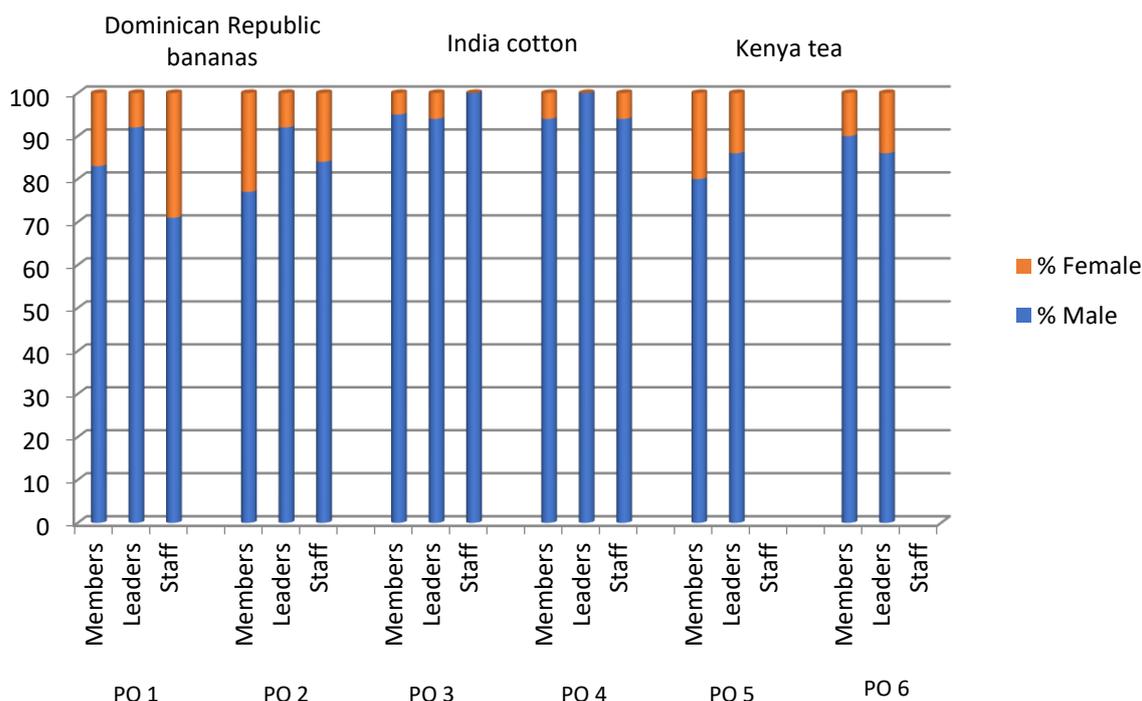
A key issue is the gender division of labour on male-controlled farms, with wives and daughters often performing a significant percentage of the labour required for certified production, but far less often involved in sales, meaning that men retain control over how income is used (Twin 2013). Some studies have even found a reinforcement of male control when women contribute more to household income, which contradicts findings in other contexts (Ruben 2008, in Sexsmith 2017 and Ruben, Fort and Zúñiga-Arias 2009). Other research suggests VSS requirements can increase workloads for smallholder farmers, and this is often in areas which women are involved in, such as weeding, harvesting and post-harvest processing (Oya et al.

⁴⁶ The certified farms were Fairtrade, organic and/or UTZ certified and were compared with non-certified farms with otherwise similar characteristics.

2018, KPMG 2013). This can be mitigated if the returns from VSS production, including any funds retained by producer organisations, are invested in labour saving technology or other benefits for

women, or if women’s labour is recognised and remunerated properly, but the available evidence indicates that this is rarely the case (Lyon 2008, Dilley 2011).

Figure 2.4
Gender Breakdown of Members, Leaders and Professional Staff in Six Producer Organisations (PO) in the Dominican Republic, India and Kenya



Source: Based on Fairtrade Foundation 2015

Additional evidence on the gender impacts of VSS comes from research with workers in export value chains. This primarily relates to factory workers in the apparel and textile sector and agricultural workers on commercial farms, as VSS adoption is more recent in other sectors and gender-related research is not readily available. In many countries women form the majority of these workers, especially in the apparel and textile sector. Studies have found a range of VSS impacts on working conditions which can particularly benefit women, including enforcement of minimum wage legislation, improvements in occupational health and safety, reductions in compulsory overtime, and provision of childcare facilities (Tallontire et al. 2005, Barrientos and Smith 2007, COSA 2008 in

Terstappen et al. 2012, NRI 2013). Critically, VSS have also sometimes led to the formalisation of wage employment, moving workers from repeated casual or temporary contracts to permanent worker status (Smith 2010, COSA 2008 and HIVOS 2014 in Sexsmith 2017). This can give workers access to a range of legislated employment benefits, such as paid leave, social security, redundancy payments and maternity rights. Women often form the majority of temporary and informal workers, with men having privileged access to more formal and skilled work (Barrientos and Smith 2007, Rossi 2013). A shift to more formalised employment can therefore be of significant benefit to women. Alongside these positive findings, studies also point to a number of limitations in the extent to

which VSS detect and address gender issues, many of which relate to how standards are implemented and audited. Firstly, the focus of VSS (particularly B2B standards) is mostly on the top tiers of supply chains, which are more visible to buyers and more within their scope of influence. Although suppliers are usually asked to enforce the standards with businesses or individuals they source from or sub-contract, research suggests that standards rarely reach workers beyond the top tier, including home-based workers who are frequently women working in precarious conditions (Chen, 2014, Svarer et al. 2017, Mezzedri 2012).

Second, because gender issues are often complex, intangible and sensitive, and reflect imbalances of power and socio-cultural norms which men and women in worksites and communities may have internalised or be reluctant to challenge or disclose, they are often not picked up during audits. This is particularly true for sexual harassment and exploitation, but also extends to issues such as discrimination where differences in employment opportunities and pay may be put down to 'natural' gender differences in skills and abilities (AFL-CIO 2013, Barrientos and Smith 2007). Auditors' capacity to identify gender issues varies and is influenced by their experience and

training, and there is an ongoing debate on whether audits can ever be accurate or independent (Short et al. 2014, Locke et al. 2007). Although efforts are being made to make auditing more gender sensitive⁴⁷, the fact that auditors usually spend one or two days a year (at most) to assess a wide range of practices in a factory or farm, and conduct short interviews with a handful of workers, is not conducive to a full understanding of gender dynamics.

Finally, the purchasing practices and business cycles of buyers can exacerbate gender issues, rather than enabling compliance with standards. For example, short lead times, production peaks, last minute changes to orders, and pressures to cut costs can lead to mandatory and excessive overtime and undermine the provision of regular, formal employment and payment of living wages (or even minimum wages). In sectors with high levels of competition, which includes most goods produced for high street and online retailing, VSS may actually reinforce a segmentation of production, with some production compliant with standards and enabling suppliers to pass audits, while other production is performed by (women) informal workers and sub-contractors who are hidden from view, in order to cut costs and remain competitive (Kaplinsky and Morris 2017b).

Case Study 2.3: Weak Implementation and Auditing Practices mean a Failure to Address Forced Labour

Research in the tea and cocoa sectors of India and Ghana, respectively, found widespread forced labour and labour exploitation on farms which had been audited as part of VSS schemes (ETI, Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance and Trustea). This included sexual violence and verbal abuse, debt bondage, and non and under-payment of wages. Women found it particularly difficult to escape exploitative conditions, and there were cases of human trafficking of women from tea plantations into domestic and sex work. Most workers on certified farms were not aware their farms were certified, and the study found 'cheating' in audit processes and loopholes in all VSS systems which allow forced labour to continue. The study author also blamed low prices and irresponsible sourcing practices by buyers in UK markets for creating a strong and systemic demand for cheap labour.

Source: LeBaron 2018

⁴⁷ See earlier reference to BSR.

2.3.3 VSS, Gender and Agenda 2030: Lessons Learned

Earlier in this chapter it was argued that voluntary standards can reinforce or fill gaps in public regulation, as well assist with implementing international agreements and conventions. When it comes to gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5), there is some evidence to support this. For women smallholder farmers this includes improved opportunities to participate in producer organisations and to access resources and training which strengthens their livelihoods. VSS can also help create opportunities for women to earn an independent income and foster a more equal balance of power within households and organisations. In the case of women workers, VSS have brought improvements in their wages and working conditions, as well as access to statutory benefits such as social security and maternity rights. More substantive and transformative change has occurred when VSS have worked alongside suppliers or producer organisations and external actors, using project funding to tackle gender issues in a holistic way. Common features of effective approaches include:

- Participatory analysis of gender inequalities and their root causes in the local context;
- Combining gender mainstreaming with affirmative action to redress imbalances;
- Engaging with men at different levels of businesses, organisations and communities to bring them onboard with the process of change;
- Ensuring women have space and effective channels to articulate their needs, priorities and grievances;
- Having VSS offices in supplier countries and building long-term relationships and trust with business and producer organisations, as well as other local actors.

In bringing about these changes for women, VSS are contributing to SDG 5, as well as SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 8 (decent work). However, the available evidence indicates that this has occurred only under certain conditions, typically where women dominate the workforce or where VSS have taken specific measures to raise

awareness of gender inequality and to extend benefits to women. Furthermore, the benefits may be limited to certain groups of women, such as women with land and workers higher up in supply chains. In general, VSS have not sufficiently integrated a gender perspective into their requirements, nor taken steps to ensure that the provisions that do exist are adequately implemented and enforced. There remain significant gaps in coverage of key issues which impinge on women's rights and opportunities. Critically, VSS have mostly failed to address structural issues which underpin gender inequalities, including:

- Unequal power relations and distribution of resources within households and communities;
- Social norms and attitudes around the types of work men and women do, including which productive activities they engage in and who is responsible for unpaid care work;
- Violence against women, including sexual harassment and exploitation and restrictions on women's mobility and voice;
- Statutory and customary laws and practices related to ownership of land and other productive assets, and exclusion of women from financial services;
- Gender differences in education and skills training and assumptions regarding the innate abilities of men and women;
- Inadequate representation of women across most structures of society, including producer and labour organisations;
- Market and supply chain dynamics which undermine sustainability and rely on flexible, low cost labour for competitiveness.

In doing so VSS have sometimes inadvertently made things worse for women by reinforcing existing patterns of inequality. This is exacerbated by the fact there is a lack of management systems to detect and deal with gender issues in a systematic way, including through auditing and reporting practices.

On a more positive note, there is growing understanding in the VSS community of these weaknesses in the approach to gender (and other social issues), and as we have seen, there are some efforts underway to try and address them, including collective initiatives and gender-focused standards. This includes building internal understanding and capacity on gender, developing gender strategies and action plans, producing guidance on how to design and implement standards in a gender-responsive way, and strengthening the representation of women in boards and other decision-making bodies. Most of these developments are too recent to evaluate their impact, but their potential to change how VSS operate is clear. Moves to embed gender into the requirements and compliance criteria of standards and to promote gender-sensitive auditing and data collection practices are also important, as VSS can play a valuable role as a reference point and management framework for sustainable and responsible practices in supply chains. This often means taking internationally agreed principles and rights and developing compliance criteria which are relevant in particular countries, sectors or production set-ups (such as plantations or smallholder farming communities). This can provide guidance for businesses as well as governments who are seeking to improve production practices; for example, ISEAL has documented several cases of VSS working in partnership with governments, including in Mozambique where VSS requirements for the cotton sector were embedded in national regulations, and in Brazil where a regional government's coffee certification scheme was benchmarked with an international VSS.⁴⁸ As such, there is potential for VSS to help set the bar for gender-responsive standards within the public and private sectors.

But VSS requirements and auditing are just the starting point, what matters is whether they

catalyse change. Including more detailed requirements related to gender helps to make the issues more visible, but it does not change the fact that many of these issues are challenging to address. It is also critically important that a supportive approach is taken, rather than a top-down, compliance-based approach which creates barriers to market entry for suppliers in countries or contexts which have a poor performance on gender equality, as that would further disadvantage the women in those locations. As with many of the social issues that sustainability standards cover, gender inequality has its roots outside supply chains, in wider society. Dealing with these issues within the supply chain alone is therefore unlikely to address the root causes and provide sustainable solutions. This is understood by many VSS systems and leading companies⁴⁹ and there is a trend towards more holistic and collaborative approaches (often at a sector level) to address these systemic issues through engagement with entities both inside and outside the supply chain, including communities, local civil society organisations and government authorities. Given the structural barriers to gender equality described above, this type of approach holds more promise for transformative gender impacts, as we have seen with the positive results achieved when VSS undertake targeted action on gender.

Going forward, the contribution of VSS to SDG 5 will depend largely on how much time, money and political will is invested in gender, both as individual systems and collectively. VSS systems typically cover a range of sectors and topics and operate on a global level, while also being under pressure to be financially sustainable without passing too much cost to supply chain actors. The degree to which gender issues are integrated into standards and VSS resources are spent on supporting improvements at the local level rather than other themes and activities comes down to a process of negotiation and the interests of

⁴⁸ See: <https://www.standardsimpacts.org/resources-reports/case-studies-governments-and-private-sustainability-standards>

⁴⁹ By this we mean companies which are leading the way on tackling sustainability issues, usually because this is key to their business strategy from a market or supply perspective.

influential stakeholders, particularly those who play a role in governance. As market-based instruments, VSS are greatly influenced by business agendas, though producers, civil society organisations and, less often, worker representatives and governments can also influence decision-making, while funding agencies can more directly determine how resources are spent. The representation of women and the importance given to gender equality varies considerably within and across these different stakeholder groups.

In the context of Agenda 2030 and campaigning by feminist and women's movements, many businesses have expressed a commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. However, the focus has primarily been on internal corporate practices rather than the supply chain. Within the supply chain sustainability issues which represent a risk to future supply or to business reputation capture more attention, such as climate change, natural resource degradation, child labour and modern slavery. Although many (if not all) of these issues have a gender dimension, it is rare that this is recognised and linked back to gender inequality. For large companies, responsibilities to shareholders and investors can make it particularly difficult to invest in areas which are not considered material risks. While there is now some acceptance that gender equality is good for business, and that inequality may represent a threat to quality and the supply of goods, relative to other issues it still appears to be on the margins of corporate and investor priorities. This may mean limited support for suppliers and producers to make improvements, as well as an absence of market signals or support to incentivise good practice. And so long as market actors downstream in supply chains, be that retailers, brands, consumers or investors, continue to privilege price over sustainability and ethics, the flexibility

and low cost of women's labour will continue to be used as a way to control costs.

To address this there is a need for greater emphasis on the linkages between gender inequality and business risk, as well as pressure on companies to promote women's rights across all part of the business, including their supply chains.⁵⁰ This should be in the context of lead firms supporting their suppliers to make improvements, and greater efforts to reduce the duplication of standards which creates unnecessary costs. There is also a need to ensure that women are adequately represented in VSS regulatory processes, including in the producer and labour organisations which form part of governance structures and which have historically been dominated by men. Efforts should also be made to reach out to women's rights organisations and informal workers associations, which to date have had little involvement in VSS and other market-based initiatives around sustainable development. This will not only increase the likelihood that sufficient attention is paid to gender issues, it will help ensure that the emphasis is on issues which really matter to women. For example, research with women working on horticulture farms in Zambia, Kenya and South Africa found that many of the workplace issues they regarded as most problematic were strongly gendered, including job security, compulsory overtime, maternity rights, access to childcare and sexual harassment (Smith et al., 2004). These issues were particularly acute for women in casual and temporary employment, who were often not protected by law and were not represented in worker organisations. The voices of women such as these needs to be amplified in VSS systems if they are to fulfil their potential contribution to SDG 5 as well Agenda 2030's commitment to 'leave no-one behind'.

⁵⁰ Oxfam's international Behind the Brands and Behind the Price⁵⁰ campaigns are a step in this direction, with considerable focus on women and women's rights in their scorecards for company performance. See: <https://www.behindthebrands.org/> and <https://www.behindtheprice.org/en/>.

2.3 Conclusions

This chapter has explored the role of voluntary sustainability standards in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. It has drawn attention to the potential for VSS to provide a reference frame for good practice within supply chains, and for VSS systems to catalyse or spearhead action on gender at global and local levels. At the same time, it has exposed a number of weaknesses in the way most VSS are constructed and implemented which mean that instead of supporting women, they may have little impact on, or even exacerbate, gender inequalities.

The need for standards to be more responsive to gender issues is recognised by leading VSS bodies, as well as a number of large companies, and many are taking steps to integrate a gender perspective more thoroughly into their standards, systems and reporting, as well as engaging in gender-focused projects. There are also some new VSS which are designed solely to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as collective initiatives by VSS and business around gender. These are all positive developments and will hopefully mean VSS can play more of a role in delivering SDG 5 in future. But questions remain as to whether recent developments will begin to address structural barriers to gender equality in households, communities and markets, or will they instead serve to reinforce a compliance-based model which further marginalises the most vulnerable women. This is something that VSS stakeholders as well as policy-makers will need to keep a close eye on in the coming years.

The findings of this review point to a number of recommendations for VSS bodies and the business community, particularly around the need to take a strategic approach to gender which is based on commitment at the highest level and adequate allocation of resources for gender-related activities. A gender perspective needs to be integrated across all aspects of VSS systems, including governance, standard setting, assurance and technical assistance. Furthermore, a 'do no harm' approach must be adopted, to ensure that VSS and core business practices do not exacerbate inequality, and measures to detect and address sexual harassment and exploitation need to be considered a priority.

The findings also highlight the need to monitor progress and conduct further research on how VSS can best support different groups of women in the widely ranging contexts where standards are applied. There is a clear need for collaboration, not only between standards bodies and businesses, but also with other actors such as government agencies, women's rights organisations, trades unions, the investment community and international agencies. Without this collaboration, and a holistic approach to addressing the root causes of gender inequality, it is unlikely that many of the changes brought about by VSS will lead to sustainable improvements in women's lives.

Chapter 3: Empowering Women to Comply with Trade-Related SPS Measures: Meeting Challenges to Achieve Sustainable Development

Executive Summary of Chapter 3

Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures are laws, regulations, and other administrative instruments that are applied for the protection of human, animal, or plant life and health. It has long been recognized that SPS measures can impede trade, and present particular challenges for low and middle-income countries. However, the development impacts of trade-related SPS measures, and in particular the extent to which these impacts are gendered, have received much less attention.

In many contexts, women struggle to comply with trade-related SPS measures, because they lack critical skills and/or face greater difficulties than men in accessing the required resources. Women, furthermore, are vulnerable to the changes that occur in the structure of global value chains and the ways in which they operate by compliance with trade-related SPS measures. Their livelihoods can be eroded and/or become more precarious as a result. Whilst trade-related SPS measures can sometimes present opportunities for the economic empowerment of women, they often lack the skills and resources required to successfully exploit these prospects.

Whilst investments have been made in the trade-related SPS capacities of low and middle-income countries, including by bilateral and multilateral donors, gender rarely guides the design and implementation of capacity-building projects and programmes. Indeed, SPS-related capacity-building tends to be seen largely as a technical process that is focused on the upgrading of

particular food safety, plant health or animal health functions and/or compliance with evolving trade-related SPS requirements. This ignores the fact that women can play a critical role in the process of compliance and that the particular constraints they face often require tailored support.

Institutions responsible for the global governance of trade-related SPS measures have an important role to play in promoting gender mainstreaming in the promulgation of national SPS measures and in the design and implementation of SPS capacity-building. The SPS Committee of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is the main forum through which member states raise concerns about trade-related SPS measures and discuss related issues, including SPS-related capacity-building. The international standards-setting organisations (ISSOs) are responsible for establishing the international standards, guidelines and recommendations that are the basis of global harmonisation of trade-related SPS measures. To date, gender has played a minimal role in the functioning of these institutions.

Trade-related SPS measures present important issues and challenges for efforts to achieve sustainable development, most notably in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 30. There is an imperative for gender to be mainstreamed in the arena of trade-related SPS measures. The leadership of donors and the more influential members of the WTO and ISSOs will be critical in achieving this.

3.1 Introduction⁵¹

Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures are employed by national governments to manage food safety, and protect plants, animals and the natural environment from potentially harmful pests and diseases. Because most of these measures are regulatory in nature, and apply equally to domestic production and imports, they impact almost all of the agri-food products that are produced and consumed globally. Broadly, SPS measures can bring significant socio-economic benefits, for example through the protection of human health, enhancement of agricultural productivity and greater food security. The application of SPS measures, therefore, should be seen as part and parcel of efforts to achieve the SDGs of Agenda 2030.

The legitimate use of SPS measures, however, can also raise costs for those who produce, process and distribute agri-food products, and create barriers to trade. Indeed, there is mounting evidence that compliance with SPS measures can present significant challenges, especially for global value chains in low and middle-income countries (World Bank, 2005). Not only has the application of SPS measures expanded rapidly over time, but business surveys indicate that SPS measures and other technical regulations are a major issue for private sector exporters (UNCTAD/World Bank, 2018). Recognising the need to ensure that low and middle-income countries are able to exploit the opportunities for sustainable development that trade offers (Stafford-Smith *et al.*, 2017), SPS measures in this way too are important for achievement of the SDGs.

In the context of efforts to promote sustainable development, it is important to consider the scope for inequalities in the impacts of trade-related SPS measures, most notably in relation to

gender. This is an issue that has received very little attention to date, promoting the assumption, at least implicitly if not explicitly, that trade-related SPS measures are gender neutral.⁵² This conflicts with evidence of the impacts of trade policies on global value chains (see for example ICTSD, 2016; Kaplinsky, 2016; Redden, 2017; Fessehaie and Morris, 2018), which suggests significant gender effects, and highlights the need to examine these in detail with respect to trade-related SPS measures specifically.

This Chapter presents an overview of the gendered nature of trade-related SPS measures and of the standards, guidelines and recommendations developed by international standards-setting organisations (ISSOs) on which these measures are often based. It then discusses how efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of Agenda 2030 impact upon women, predominantly in the context of the global value chains in which they do (or do not) participate. The last section examines the extent to which gender issues play a role in the global governance of bodies that promulgate SPS measures and/or in capacity-building efforts aimed at facilitating compliance with trade-related SPS measures. Whilst the gender issues associated with SPS measures are shown to be both significant and complex, gender considerations have not been sufficiently mainstreamed by global trade and development institutions. The chapter concludes by considering the policy implications and recommended actions for international trade institutions, multilateral and bilateral donors, and low and middle-income country governments that are needed to ensure that trade-related SPS measures contribute to inclusive sustainable development.

⁵¹ The chapter draws on an earlier paper produced by the same author for the ICTSD programme on Inclusive Economic Transformation, as part of a DFAT-funded project 'New Thinking on Trade and Gender'.

⁵² A recent paper by Busiello *et al.* (2018) suggests that gender is often a forgotten issue with respect to compliance with regulations and standards more generally: for example, the author indicates that only 40 per cent of voluntary sustainability standards include at least one gender issues.

3.2 Nature of SPS Measures and the Role of the SPS Agreement

In order to understand the gendered nature of trade-related SPS measures, it is important to have a good appreciation of the nature of these measures and the efforts that have been made by the international community to lay down rules for their application. The term ‘SPS measure’ specifically refers to laws, regulations, standards, conformity assessment measures and other administrative instruments aimed at protecting human, animal or plant life or health. These measures might require that agri-food products are produced, processed and/or handled in particular ways, do not contain harmful substances, or at least that the level of these substances is not beyond levels that are deemed acceptable. With respect to plant and animal products, SPS measures can stipulate that these products originate from areas that are recognized to be free of particular pests or diseases and/or that they have been treated in specific ways. Various mechanisms can be employed to assess and ensure compliance with these requirements including the inspection of facilities that produce, process and/or handle food, and the testing of food products. (Grant and Arita, 2017).

Through the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (the so-called ‘SPS Agreement’), the WTO defines the rights and responsibilities of Member States with respect to food safety and plant and animal health measures that have the potential to impact trade. The Agreement stipulates that Member States have the right to implement the protections on human, animal and plant life or health that they deem appropriate provided that these measures do not restrict trade unnecessarily and in a manner that is discriminatory, and that can be justified scientifically (Henson and Loader, 2001). The benchmark for judging whether SPS measures are legitimate in the context of the SPS Agreement is

the international standards, guidelines and recommendations of the international standards-setting organisations (ISSOs).⁵³ Member States can veer from these international standards, guidelines and recommendations, but must be able to justify the SPS measures they employ if they do so.

Alongside the SPS measures implemented by governments, a growing range of VSS standards have been implemented by non-government entities including individual businesses, producers and industry organisations and third-party certification bodies, which are reviewed in Chapter 2 of this publication. Whilst these private standards tend to take as their starting point the regulatory requirements of the importing countries in which they are employed, they are often stricter than official SPS measures (Fulponi, 2006), and may also cover a broader range of technical barriers to trade (TBT) issues.

Compliance with trade-related SPS measures involves a multi-stage and iterative process.⁵⁴ It is important to recognise the various elements of this process, including the actors involved and the resources these actors need to access, in order to understand the impacts that trade-related SPS measures have on sustainable development, and in particular on specific actors therein, including women. The key stages of this process are as follows:

- Understand the SPS measure with which compliance is being required.
- Assess the extent to which current SPS controls currently comply with the measure.
- Define the actions needed to achieve compliance.
- Make necessary upgrades to SPS controls.
- Assess and demonstrate compliance with the SPS measure.
- Maintain SPS capacity.

⁵³ In the case of food safety this is the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), plant health the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), and animal health the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

⁵⁴ Compliance with private standards involves a comparable compliance process.

As will be seen below, this six stage compliance process and attendant challenges is highly gendered.

A growing body of literature provides a blend of anecdotal evidence, case studies and quantitative assessments that demonstrate the challenges that low and middle-incomes face in complying with trade-related SPS requirements (see for example, World Bank, 2005). These challenges reflect weaknesses in the capacity to manage food safety and plant and animal health, and the problems faced in accessing the technical and other resources needed to achieve compliance with specific trade-related SPS requirements.

Technical assistance has been provided by bilateral and multilateral that aims to enhance the trade-related SPS capacity of low and middle-income countries. This assistance effectively seeks to offset the resource constraints faced at critical stages of the compliance process. Historically, the majority of this assistance has been directed at the upgrading of SPS-related infrastructure and institutions, especially in the public sector. Increasingly, however, the focus

has shifted to the challenges faced by global value chains in seeking to comply with trade-related SPS measures (Redden, 2017).

Whilst in many instances trade-related SPS measures impede trade, it is important to recognise that the process of compliance can also be a powerful catalyst of innovation and the upgrading of global value chains (see for example, Dries and Swinnen, 2004; Gulati *et al.*, 2007), with potentially positive impacts on sustainable development. Henson and Jaffee (2006) show how exporters that are proactive in reacting to the challenges of complying with trade-related SPS measures can benefit over rivals that delay investments in upgrading. Furthermore, entire export industries can reap a competitive advantage over less capable competitors, largely on the basis of the investments they have made in SPS compliance (World Bank, 2005). The Kenyan fresh produce sector is an often-quoted example of this (Jaffee, 2003), with evidence of appreciably improvements in the livelihoods of smallholders and other indicators of sustainable development (World Bank, 2005).

3.3 SPS Measures, Gender and Sustainable Development

The term 'gender' refers to the social-constructed roles and behaviours of men and women, and to the relations between men and women, in specific economic, social, cultural and political contexts (Randriamaro, 2005).⁵⁵ The fact that entitlements and responsibilities differ between men and women determines (and at the same time reflects) the prevailing distribution of resources, access to livelihood opportunities, participation in information and knowledge sharing networks, decision-making power, and legal, social and political rights within both society and family units. Overwhelmingly, relations between men and women are characterised by power dynamics that privilege the interests of men and subordinate women. At

the same time, however, given that the specific meanings, practices and consequences of gender norms and relations are driven by economic, geographical, political, social and cultural factors, they differ from place to place and change over time (Schumacher, 2014).

Whilst trade-related SPS measures are 'part and parcel' of the global trade and development agenda, they are qualitatively distinct and significantly more complex in their nature and potential impacts than most other trade measures:

- They are implemented for the protection of human, plant and animal health and, as such, not only impose costs through their potential

⁵⁵ The notion of gender is distinct from 'sex' which refers to the biological characteristics of men and women (Panelli, 2004).

to impede trade, but can bring about significant benefits in terms of social welfare, for example through improved food safety or enhanced agricultural productivity because of the reduced prevalence of animal or plant pests and diseases.

- They are highly technical in nature and require access to scientific knowledge and technical expertise and experience in order to achieve compliance in an effective and efficient manner.
- Compliance with trade-related SPS measures often requires substantial investments across both the public and private sectors, whilst the significant economies of scale associated with these investments mean that compliance can have significant distributional consequences.
- Both the public and private and private sectors in exporting countries can face choices in how to comply with trade-related SPS measures, with the chosen pathway towards compliance significantly influencing the impact on trade and the performance of global value chains, and the welfare of those they employ.
- Compliance with trade-related SPS measures can induce significant changes to the organisation, governance and *modus operandi* of global value chains, such that the impacts can be complex, wide-ranging and, at times, unpredictable.

As will be seen below, these are all factors that need to be considered in assessing the gendered impacts of trade-related SPS measures in the context of efforts to promote sustainable development.

Whilst little attention to date has been given to the gendered impacts of trade-related SPS measures,⁵⁶ it is reasonable to expect that these are considerable and a pertinent issue for efforts to promote sustainable development.⁵⁷ Indeed, there is evidence that trade-related SPS measures and other market-entry conditions and requirements are an urgent and pervasive problem for low and middle-country exporters, and especially under-resourced female

businesses (Tran-Ngyen and Beviglia-Zampetti, 2004). Global value chains, and the processes by which these respond to external forces in the context of trade, are highly gendered. Furthermore, it is recognised that laws and regulations in both the national and international spheres have a significant and often adverse impact on women (World Bank, 2018).

With respect to the gendered nature of trade-related SPS measures, there are three critical questions:

- To what extent are women adversely impacted by trade-related SPS measures and/or prevented from exploiting the potential benefits from compliance with these measures?
- How important are women in efforts to enhance trade-related SPS capacity in low and middle-income countries, and to what extent are their roles and circumstances considered in the design and implementation of SPS-related technical assistance?
- To what extent are gender issues considered in the global governance of trade-related SPS measures, most notably in the context of the SDGs and Agenda 2030?

The first of these three questions is motivated by evidence of the gendered nature of global value chains and their response to trade-related opportunities (see for example, Bamber and Staritz, 2016; Fessehaie and Morris, 2018; Maertens *et al.*, 2012). Thus, for example, exports of fresh fruit and vegetables from low and middle-income countries have induced a shift from fragmented value chains based on market-based relationships to highly coordinated and integrated supply chains (Schumacher, 2014). That regulations and standards, furthermore, are a key element of the environment in which global value chain operate, significantly influencing chain performance and impacting the welfare of individuals employed within those chains, including women (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017). The gendered division of labour within global

⁵⁶ Notable exceptions include Carr and Ito (2010), Sengendo (2010) and Kareem (2017).

⁵⁷ The one area where there has been some recognition of the importance of gender is the importance of women in the implementation of SPS-related technical assistance.

value chains can limit the economic opportunities available to women (Fontana and Paciello, 2010), and that they face greater difficulties than men in accessing the resources required for upgrading. In addition, women often inhabit precarious positions within global value chains, such that they are more adversely affected by shocks that impact how these chains are organised and/or operate. It is not unreasonable to expect, therefore, that the impact of trade-related SPS measures on global value chains, and on the women that are employed within them, will be significant. This issue is discussed further in Section 4.

The fact that women play a key role in global value chains, and especially in the primary production of agri-food products is well documented (Kabeer, 2012; Bamber and Staritz, 2016). By implication, therefore, it is reasonable to expect that women undertake critical functions in the upgrading of global value chains in response to trade-related SPS measures. The impact of efforts to build the capacity of low and middle-income countries to comply with trade-

related SPS measures, consequently, will be dependent on the extent to which they take account of the roles and special needs and circumstances of women within the impacted global value chains. This suggests that gender-sensitive SPS capacity-building is important not only to ensure that women are not adversely impacted by compliance with trade-related SPS measures, but also for the effectiveness and efficiency of capacity-building itself. Section 5 explores this issue.

Finally, institutions such as the WTO and the ISSOs play a key role in defining the rights and responsibilities of nation states with respect to the trade-related SPS measures they apply, and in ensuring that low and middle-income countries are not unduly impacted. To the extent that trade-related SPS measures have distinct and (especially) adverse impacts on women, it is important that gender is mainstreamed in the global governance of these measures, especially in the context of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. This is the focus of Section 6.

3.4 The Gendered Impacts of Trade-Related SPS Measures

To date, limited attention has been given to the gendered impacts of trade-related SPS measures. Whilst a number of cases studies (such as those presented in Boxes 1 and 2 below) highlight the ways in which women are impacted by compliance with trade-related SPS measures, gender has tended to be a peripheral issue in the underlying analysis. Furthermore, quantitative studies of compliance with trade-related SPS measures have largely focused on the macro trade and/or firm-level impacts, with little or no attention to the degree to which these impacts are gendered (see for example, Czubala *et al.*, 2009; Crivelli and Gröschl, 2012; Kang and Ramizo, 2017). One notable exception, however, is

Kareem (2017) which shows how compliance with EU SPS and TBT measures has contributed to gender inequality in agriculture in terms of employment and incomes.⁵⁸

Some indication of the gendered impacts of compliance with trade-related SPS measures is provided by experiences with private food safety standards (for example, GlobalGAP) and the impacts on smallholder participation in global value chains for fresh produce. The picture here is rather mixed. Some studies suggest that smallholders have been excluded from global value chains because of the challenges of compliance with the standards demanded by European supermarkets. Other studies, however,

⁵⁸ This econometric analysis estimates that a 10 per cent increase in EU notifications to the WTO of SPS and TBT measures reduces the global relative employment of women in agriculture by 3.4 per cent. Conversely in certain regions, namely sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, EU SPS and TBT measures are found to increase the employment of women in agriculture.

provide evidence that smallholders have a comparative advantage in achieving compliance, especially for crops requiring care and attention, and that both the level and resilience of their livelihoods increases as a result (see for example, Dolan and Humphrey, 2000; Danielou and Ravry, 2005; World Bank, 2005). With respect to the specific impact on women, there is more consistent evidence that women have been excluded from smallholder production (Eaton and Shepherd, 2001; Dolan, 2001; 2004; Kabeer, 2012). At the same time, are indications that increased opportunities for women in estate production and commercial food processing can bring greater and more secure employment and enhanced incomes (Maertens and Swinnen, 2012).

Lessons can also be learned from the impacts of sustainability and social standards (see for example, Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017; Busiello *et al.*, 2018) and the degree to which these are gendered. For example, with respect to organic standards, there is evidence that women face challenges in achieving compliance, but that they derive substantial economic and social benefits when they manage to do so in terms of employment, incomes and/or health. A number of studies have examined the gender issues associated with organic certification of coffee in Uganda (see for example, Bolwig, 2012; Kasente, 2012; Meemken *et al.*, 2017). These studies suggest that women struggle to achieve organic certification because of less access to information on the nature of organic standards and the changes in production needed to achieve compliance. For example, women tend to be excluded from both the informal and formal mechanisms through which information is exchanged between (male) producers, and are less likely to participate in training sessions. At the same time, many of the operations required by organic farming systems, for example manual weeding and pest scouting, are dominated by women. Whilst the workload of women tends to increase as a result, they have less control than men over the proceeds from organic coffee production.

On the basis of the indirect evidence presented above, it is reasonable to expect that the impacts of trade-related SPS measures are indeed gendered, but that these impacts will vary, for example across countries and sectors, in terms of their nature and magnitude. In order to begin understanding when and how women are likely to be impacted by trade-related SPS measures, therefore, it is necessary to focus on the process through which global value chains work towards and achieve compliance with the trade-related SPS measures they face. Furthermore, the ways in which this process drives changes in the structure of global value chains and the ways in which these operate.

The key challenges faced by global value chains in complying with regulations and standards relate to the high costs that are associated with compliance, and the consequent need for actors in these chains to access specialised and often scarce resources (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017). As a result, the compliance process frequently results in the exclusion of disadvantaged actors, such as women. At the same time, however, compliance with trade-related SPS measures both induces and can offer opportunities for the upgrading of value chains in potentially positive ways (Henson and Jaffee, 2006). Critical here is to understand the routes through which upgrading takes place and the extent to which the challenges faced by women and men differ in scale and substance.

The costs of compliance with trade-related SPS measures often involve significant upfront investments (see for example, World Bank, 2005; UNCTAD, 2005; Megapesca, 2017). Furthermore, there are frequently significant economies of scale and scope that favour larger value chain actors (Henson *et al.*, 2004; Aloui and Kenny, 2005; World Bank, 2005; Ponte, 2012). Given that female-operated enterprises within global value chains tend to be smaller than those operated by men (Bamber and Staritz, 2016; Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017) this will tend to disadvantage women. Case studies of compliance with trade-related SPS measures (such as those presented in Boxes 1 and 2) highlight how small businesses

struggle to absorb the costs associated with compliance. Sudden changes in SPS requirements are especially problematic. Small businesses, as a consequence, tend to comply in a reactive rather than proactive mode and are frequently engaged in a continuous process of 'catch-up'.

Because of the technical nature of trade-related SPS measures, compliance generally requires that enterprises must comprehend at least basic elements of the reasons for the measure and the practices that they are being required to adopt. Furthermore, enterprises must maintain records that demonstrate compliance on an ongoing basis, and to pass these on to downstream actors within global value chains and/or to regulatory authorities. Value chain actors lacking basic literacy and numeracy are placed at a significant disadvantage as a result (Kaplinsky, 2016; Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017). In many low and middle-income countries, literacy and numeracy rates are significantly lower in women than men (Bamber and Staritz, 2016). Indeed, women often lack the education and expertise required to comply with regulations and standards, which acts to their detriment, for example in terms of employment and incomes (Fontana and Paciello, 2010).

Compliance with trade-related SPS measures is often dependent on access to specific technical, productive and/or financial resources. The fact that women face greater challenges than men in gaining access to these resources means that the process of compliance acts to their disadvantage. Women often struggle to access land, capital, knowledge and reliable infrastructure (Fontana and Paciello, 2010). For example, evidence from Mozambique suggests that men are twice as likely as women to access extension services (Fontana, 2011).⁵⁹ More generally, women tend to have less access to training than men (Barrientos *et al.*, 2001), despite the fact that this has been shown to be essential for upgrading in sectors such as horticulture (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011). Women also tend to be less successful

at seeking out new information and markets than men (Barham and Chitemi, 2009), predominantly because they are excluded from social networks that require interaction with non-related men.

The process of compliance with trade-related SPS measures can induce significant changes to the structure of global value chains and how they work. Reflecting the economies of scale and scope associated with compliance with trade-related SPS measures (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017; Ponte, 2012), consolidation of actors at key stages of the value chain takes place. At the same time, value chain actors make efforts to minimise the costs of compliance they face, and adjust their operations and the linkages they have with up- and down-stream actors in order to achieve compliance in the most effective and efficient manner (Henson and Jaffee, 2006). Smaller and less advantaged businesses are especially vulnerable to these changes. This reflects the fact that they often lack critical skills and struggle to access the resources required for compliance. Also, because the often-considerable transaction costs associated with trade-related SPS measures induces integration between larger actors at different levels of the value chain (Henson and Humphrey, 2010).

Efforts to comply with EU hygiene requirements for fish and fishery products in South Asia (Boxes 1 and 2) illustrate the ways in which trade-related SPS measures can act to exclude women from global value chains. These cases provide examples of the adverse impacts on women, that can have profound implications for their livelihood and social position, and ultimately for their health and wellbeing (Bamber and Staritz, 2016; Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017). These impacts reflect the fact that women are frequently employed in the most precarious activities within global value chains, and lack the skills and access to resources needed in order to upgrade in the face of the compliance challenges posed by trade-related SPS measures.

⁵⁹ The limited access of women to extension services has also been observed in Cambodia and Vietnam (Fontana, 2012) and Honduras (Bamber and Fernandez-Stark, 2013), amongst other countries.

It is reasonable to expect that these examples of the active exclusion of women from global value chains represent the ‘tip of the iceberg’ of the impact of compliance with trade-related SPS measures. Indeed, the upfront costs of compliance with SPS measures are frequently prohibitive for women and can prevent them from exploiting potentially-lucrative opportunities to export high-value agri-food

products (Tran-Nguyern and Beviglia-Zampetti, 2004). The enormity of the challenge of compliance can mean that women are often deterred from even making efforts to enter these value chains. This observation holds for compliance with regulations and standards more generally, including (perhaps ironically) those focused on sustainability and social issues (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017).

Box 3.1: Compliance with EU Hygiene Requirements in Kerala Shrimp Export Sector

In 1991, the European Union (EU) implemented harmonised requirements for hygiene in the capture, processing, transportation, and storage of fish and fishery products. Countries exporting fish and fishery products to the EU, such as shrimp, were required to ensure that facilities in their own country complied with these requirements. These included the implementation of HACCP-based controls along the value chain for fish and fishery products, and in many cases the upgrading of fishing vessels and fish processing and storage facilities. A number of countries struggled to meet these requirements, and indeed faced restrictions on their fish and fishery product exports as a result. Furthermore, the EU’s hygiene requirements often induced significant changes to the structure and *modus operandi* of export-oriented value chains, which had significant implications for local poor populations, and women in particular. The case of shrimp exports from the southern Indian state of Kerala provides one example.

Historically, the cleaning and deshelling of shrimp in the Kerala shrimp export value chain was undertaken by independent preprocessors. Processing facilities were typically little more than freezing plants that assembled, froze and packaged shrimp in bulk prior to export. In 1997, there were 931 independent preprocessing facilities registered with the Government of India. These operations absorbed much of the risks associated with fluctuations in raw material prices, and carried the significant fixed and variable costs associated with pre-processing operations. At the same time, in-home peeling of shrimp on a piece-rate basis remained common, despite the long-term efforts of the Government of India to eradicate this process as part of efforts to enhance hygiene controls within the value chain.

In 1997, as a result of the upgrading of hygiene controls within the shrimp value chain in response to the regulatory requirements of the EU, the Government of India prohibited the use of independent preprocessors by EU-approved exporters. The immediate impact was the closure of close to half of the independent pre-processing facilities. The remaining home-based peeling was eradicated completely from the supply chain for shrimp destined for the EU. Whilst the Government of India soon backtracked in the face of significant preprocessing under-capacity and implemented a system of inspection and licencing of independent operations, this did not prevent further rationalisation from taking place, as most EU-approved processing facilities made investments in integrated preprocessing operations.

The changes that took place in response to the EU’s hygiene regulations had significant socio-economic impacts at the local level, and especially on women. Home-based peeling of shrimp had been undertaken almost entirely by women, many of whom were not permitted to work outside the home. The rate of employment of women in independent preprocessing facilities was also significant. This contrasts with upgraded shrimp processing facilities that integrated preprocessing into their operations, that were staffed almost entirely by men. Faced with limited alternative employment opportunities, this

resulted in a significant decline in the livelihoods of poor women in shrimp fishing communities along the coast of Kerala.

Source: Henson et al. (2004)

In addition to leading to potentially lead to the exclusion of women from global value chains, compliance with trade-related SPS measures can also adversely impact the position of women within these chains (Rossi, 2013). These changes reflect shifts in the structure of value chains and the ways in which they operate that are induced by compliance. For example, there are cases where food safety and other standards for fresh produce have caused a shift from smallholder

contract production to vertically-integrated estate production (Maertens and Swinnen, 2012). In turn, women's role within these value chain has shifted from owner-managers of small businesses to employed labourers in large-scale commercial enterprises. There is evidence, however, that these changes can be beneficial to women in terms of their income and work conditions.

Box 3.2: Compliance with EU Hygiene Requirements in Bangladesh Shrimp Export Sector

The implementation of harmonised hygiene requirements for fish and fishery products by the EU, as described in Box 2, have also had significant impacts on the export-oriented value chain for shrimp (including prawns) in Bangladesh, although in quite different ways. Again, however, there were significant and detrimental impacts on poor, local women.

In contrast to Kerala, where most shrimp for export were captured from the wild, most shrimp exported from Bangladesh was cultivated in aquaculture operations. Many coastal communities of Bangladesh had come to depend on fish farming as a source of employment and income, often with few alternative livelihood opportunities apart from farming. Efforts to comply with the EU's hygiene requirements for fish and fishery products induced profound changes in the structure of shrimp production as exporters sort to command greater control over hygiene along the value chain.

Historically, shrimp had been cultivated in two distinct production systems in Bangladesh. Freshwater prawn (*Golda*) production was undertaken on a small scale and involved the cultivation of wild fry. *Golda* production involved large numbers of poor producers, many of whom were landless. Furthermore, women were actively involved in the management of ponds, wild capture of fry, etc. In contrast, the production of brackish-water prawns (*Bagda*) was generally undertaken in larger operations and was integrated with the cultivation of fry rather than wild capture. Most of these operations employed wage labour, which was mainly men.

The upgrading of hygiene controls along the shrimp value chain induced the restructuring of the shrimp value chain in Bangladesh. Processing facilities had generally procured raw material from producers through intermediaries, most notably village traders (*Farias*) that mediated between producers and the village depots where shrimp were consolidated prior to collection by a processing facility. In order to comply with the EU's hygiene requirements, the Government of Bangladesh banned *Farias* from the value chain and required the upgrading of the facilities of village depots. There was significant rationalisation of village depots as a result. At the same time, shrimp producers were required to implement enhanced hygiene controls.

These changes induced, in turn, changes to shrimp production. Small-scale producers had been reliant on the cash advances made by *Farias* and also the amalgamation function that these agents performed. The restructuring of the value chain, therefore, induced the progressive consolidation of production in larger-scale operations and a shift towards *Bagda* production.

Whilst efforts were made to upgrade the hygiene controls of small-scale shrimp producers, including through a Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF)-funded project lead by FAO, a significant proportion of small-scale producers abandoned shrimp cultivation and returned to rice farming. Furthermore, there was a marked decline in the employment of women in the value chain, both in the capture of wild fry and in shrimp cultivation. Women in these communities had few alternative livelihood opportunities except within agriculture.

Source: FAO (2016); Ito (2004; 2007); Haque (2003); Redden (2017).

Whilst there is widespread evidence that compliance with regulations and standards have a negative impact on women in low and middle-income countries (see for example, Kaplinsky and Morris, 2017), there are cases where women have been able to enhance and/or diversify their livelihood. Box 3 presents the example of sesame seed and shea nut exports from Nigeria. Similar experiences have been observed with exports of mango from Burkina Faso and watermelon from

Tonga (Redden, 2017). In both of these cases, small-scale producers and processors have successfully upgraded their food safety controls, including the implementation of hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP), and installed sanitary processing and handling facilities. Success in meeting the SPS requirements of their target markets have brought income-earning opportunities, including for significant numbers of women.

Box 3.3: Promoting Food Safety in Nigeria's Sesame Seed and Shea Nut Export Sector

Whilst Nigeria is one of the world's largest producers of sesame seed and shea nuts, efforts to promote exports of these products to high-value markets in the EU and US have been hampered by poor food safety practices. Most notably, the use of inappropriate post-harvest handling methods has contributed to widescale contamination with aflatoxins. These problems have hampered efforts to enhance the livelihood of communities that are engaged in the production and/or processing of sesame seeds and shea nuts. Importantly, the processing of shea nuts is dominated by women in these communities, who are organised into self-governing local cooperatives.

Through a public-private partnership, the Nigeria Export Promotion Council (NEPC) and ITC supported the implementation of good practices in the production and control of sesame seeds and shea nuts. Partners were drawn from across government and industry, and included local agencies and trade associations such as the Sesame Seed Association and Shea Nut Producers Association. Interventions included awareness-raising and information-sharing through the distribution of publicity materials and public-private dialogues. A series of capacity-building workshops on safety and quality connected stakeholders along the production and supply chain, and promoted trade opportunities.

Eight sites with modern processing equipment for cleaning sesame seeds and processing shea butter were established nationwide. A cost-sharing partnership between the private sector, cooperatives and NEPC was established to manage these sites. A training programme for extension officers, traders, exporters and standards enforcement officers was rolled out on Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and HACCP to improve product safety and quality. As a result, over 1,000 women processors were trained. Manuals on safety and quality, codes of good practice and national standards were updated, and a traceability system was set up for both sesame seeds and shea nut products. Finally, efforts were made to minimise the risks associated with aflatoxin contamination along the sesame seed and shea nut value chains.

As a result of the project, the Ifedawapo Shea Butter Cooperative in Saki, which consists of 120 small-scale buyers and processors, had product samples certified by the National Agency for Food and Drug

Administration and Control and by internationally-accredited laboratories. Within two years of the project, the Cooperative had sold over 200 tonnes to major Nigerian and US cosmetics companies, and had secured additional orders for a further 500 tonnes. The development of shea butter processing sites is now being replicated nationwide. More than four new processing facilities have been operationalized, bringing new opportunities for women and young people.

Source: STDF (2016)

Cases where women have benefited from compliance with trade-related SPS measures provide important insights into the conditions under which successful upgrading can be achieved (see for example, STDF, 2016). A characteristic common to all of the examples above is the provision of technical assistance, generally funded by bilateral or multilateral donors but usually implemented in collaboration with local partners. The role of technical assistance, and the degree to which this takes account of the roles, needs and position of women, is reviewed in Section 5. Most instances of success in complying with trade-related SPS measures, furthermore, involve collection action amongst small producers, processors or traders. Often this is facilitated through cooperatives and/or women's groups.

The fact that women can be successful in complying with trade-related SPS measures also reflects the fact that, under some conditions, they have a comparative advantage within global value chains that is brought about and/or enhanced by the process of compliance. This frequently reflects the need for manual tasks that

require a degree of dexterity and/or that do not need high levels of literacy or numeracy. In the Kenyan fresh produce sector, for example, women and children play a key role in scouting for pests, and harvesting and handling produce in the context of exacting food safety requirements, predominantly driven by the private standards demanded by European supermarkets (Jaffee, 2003).

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the potentially significant and also varied gendered impacts of trade-related SPS measures in low and middle-income countries. The overarching message is that trade-related SPS measures are an important issue for sustainable development. Such measures can variously empower or disempower women, impact the burden of their daily lives, and erode or enhance their economic and social position (Bamber and Staritz, 2016). Trade-related SPS measures are clearly an important issue for Agenda 2030, requiring that actions be taken to address the challenges and opportunities that are presented to women by these measures as part of broader efforts to achieve the SDGs.

3.5 The Importance of Integrating a Gender Lens in SPS Capacity-Building

In order to address the challenges faced in complying with trade-related SPS measures, investments have been made in the upgrading of food safety and plant and animal health capacity in low and middle-income countries. Technical assistance by bilateral and multilateral donors has played a role in these efforts, both as part of longer-term projects and programmes aimed at enhancing structural SPS capacity and in the context of immediate challenges complying with

specific SPS measures. Indeed, the SPS Agreement provides a mechanism through which low and middle-income countries can request technical assistance, and encourages WTO Members to aid low and middle-income countries where compliance requires substantial investment. Over time, many lessons have been learned regarding the impacts of SPS-related technical assistance and efforts made to promote 'good practice'.

Section 4 has outlined how women play a key role in the global value chains for many agri-food products and face particular challenges in the context of compliance with trade-related SPS measures. Parts of global value chains that are critical to compliance with trade-related SPS measures are often dominated by women, such that success in achieving compliance is dependent on addressing the barriers they face.⁶⁰ The upgrading of value chains driven by compliance with trade-related SPS measures, furthermore, can act to exclude women and/or prevent them from participating in compliance processes that can bring potentially-lucrative economic opportunities. For these reasons, it is critical that SPS capacity-building efforts are designed and implemented in a manner that is gender-sensitive. More broadly, there is a need to consider the implications for women in the design and implementation of SPS capacity-building projects and programmes.

First, the specific constraints faced by women in complying with trade-related SPS measures must be given priority in capacity-building programs and projects. Direct support might be given to the compliance efforts of women, for example through the dissemination of information, provision of training and financing.⁶¹ Here, using cellphone and/or internet-based platforms for information relating to compliance, for example, could be an effective and low-cost strategy.⁶² The upgrading of capacity more generally, however, can also address the constraints faced by women if this enhances the availability and/or reduces the costs of key compliance resources. For example, the establishment of local inspection and certification capacity as a substitute for the use of foreign providers acts to reduce the cost of

these services for all, but benefits women more to the extent that they face greater constraints in accessing and/or financing the inspection and/or certification required to demonstrate compliance.

Second, the focus of capacity-building should be on the longer-term and systemic development of SPS capacity across the public and private sectors. This contrasts with much donor-funded capacity-building which is directed at compliance with specific SPS requirements for market access. The aim here is to enhance the capacity of small business (which as outlined above are disproportionately operated by women) to comply with emerging trade-related SPS requirements in a strategic manner and alongside efforts to upgrade within global value chains and contribute to sustainable development. In this way, furthermore, costs of compliance can be reduced and/or integrated into longer-term investments that can be easier and less costly for women to finance.

Third, SPS capacity-building projects and programmes must be delivered in a manner that facilitates the participation of women and minimises the burden that capacity-building efforts place upon them. For example, the provision of extension advice by men in communities of female farmers, but where women are prohibited from interaction with men outside of their family, acts to exclude them. Furthermore, holding information dissemination and training events around times that women are engaged in meal preparation and/or childcare can prevent their participation and/or impose an extra burden at a time of the day when they are already fully-employed. Conversely, there are ways in which extension can be provided that can

⁶⁰ For example, Fessehaie and Morris (2018) highlight the role of women in tea plucking and fish processing in South Asia, and emphasise the importance that support to value chain upgrading prioritises women's technical and financial capacity.

⁶¹ Of course, social-cultural and/or legal constraints faced by women in accessing critical resources (for example land) might be beyond the scope of SPS capacity-building and can still act to impede their efforts to comply with trade-related SPS measures.

⁶² Where implementing this strategy, organizations should take care that women in target populations are not prevented access to mobile phones by economic and cultural factors: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2019/04/10/mobile-phones-are-key-to-economic-development-are-women-missing-out/?utm_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=71720872

facilitate the inclusion of women, for example train-the-trainer programmes for female producers, processors and/or traders, and NGO-led training of women's groups and cooperatives.

A number of bilateral and multilateral donors⁶³ have made efforts to implement more gender-focused trade-related SPS capacity-building projects and programmes (see Box 4 for an illustrative example). Predominantly, however,

capacity-building remains focused on the task of achieving compliance with specific trade-related SPS requirements in the most technically-effective and economically-efficient manner.⁶⁴ Whilst a broader range of capacity-building projects and programmes do focus on the poor, and in so doing likely benefit women⁶⁵, most do not mainstream gender in a manner that ensures (and indeed prioritises) the roles, challenges faced, and impacts on women.

Box 3.4: Implementation of Good Agricultural Practices in Malian Mango Sector

As part of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EiF), support was provided to the Malian mango sector with the objective of addressing the supply-side constraints faced by the sector and enhancing its export competitiveness. The EiF supported mango producers and exporters in meeting SPS standards, including phytosanitary treatment of orchards, implementation of good agricultural practices (GAP), certification to GlobalGAP, etc. It also provided the equipment necessary for assessing the compliance of mangoes with SPS requirements at the airport, and marketing support at national and international trade events. There is significant involvement of women in mango production in the Yanfolila region, where the project focused.

Together with development partners and through the EiF framework, the Government of Mali established a fruit processing unit for the production of mango jam by the Djiguiya Women Cooperative of Yanfolila. The cooperative has approximately 100 members at the time of the intervention. The Yanfolila fruit processing unit (ULTRAFRUY) was focused on empowering these women by adding value to local fruits. With EIF support, ULTRAFRUY achieved ISO 22000 certification. A total of 16 women from the Cooperative were trained in quality and food hygiene standards.

Mango jam is now exported to Europe, USA, Gulf countries and North Africa. On the local market, the mango jam is sold to hotels and supermarkets. Through the EiF, 465 women in Yanfolila have been able to earn higher wages through mango production and jam-making.

Source: Taupiac (2016)

⁶³ For example, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EiF) and World Bank.

⁶⁴ This observation is based on a non-systematic scan of reports on SPS-related technical assistance provided to the SPS Committee, websites of multilateral agencies involved in the provision of SPS-related technical assistance (for example, FAO, UNIDO, ITC, etc.). A more systematic review is needed to corroborate this conclusion.

⁶⁵ One provider of SPS-related technical assistance that has begun to recognise the importance of gender, and that has made some efforts to consider gender within its activities is the STDF. Thus, the STDF's annual report of 2017 states (STDF, 2017). A recent STDF briefing note outlines examples of the importance of women to SPS capacity-building. A meta-analysis of evaluations of STDF projects completed in or before 2015 (Andersson, 2018), however, questions the extent to which STDF projects have mainstreamed gender in practice. Efforts have also been made to mainstream gender by organisations engaged in the provision of trade-related technical assistance more generally, including that work partly in the SPS area. One example is UNIDO, which has published a detailed guide to gender mainstreaming in trade-related technical capacity-building (UNIDO, 2015).

3.6 Role of Gender in the Global Governance of Trade-Related SPS Measures

The foregoing discussion has focused on the gendered nature of compliance with trade-related SPS measures and related capacity-building projects and programmes. It highlights the critical gender issues needing to be addressed, and outlines how gender mainstreaming remains the exception rather than the norm. Of course, the remaining (and perhaps most pertinent)

question is why gender issues have not been taken more seriously in this arena? This question puts the 'spot light' on the institutions charged with the global governance of trade-related SPS measures, namely the WTO and the ISSOs and that set the broader context in which national SPS measures are promulgated.⁶⁶

3.6.1 World Trade Organisation

The SPS Agreement is central to the international governance of trade-related SPS measures. Not only does the Agreement lay down the rights and responsibilities of WTO Member States with respect to the application of trade-related SPS measures, but it provides a formal mechanism through which Member States can provide information, raise concerns and air grievances regarding the measures applied by other WTO Members.⁶⁷

The forum through which WTO Member States engage face-to-face on trade-related SPS measures is the SPS Committee. This committee meets three times annually in Geneva. Delegates to the SPS Committee represent the interests of their country and address the issues and concerns raised by other WTO Members. The proceedings of the SPS Committee focus largely on technical aspects of, and the scientific justification for, the SPS measures applied by WTO Member States and/or their trade impacts. The SPS Committee is also used as a forum for the discussion of wider issues associated with SPS measures, for example the growing prevalence and impacts of private standards, and for reporting on the SPS-related activities of multilateral organisations, amongst

other things. The impacts on sustainable development of trade-related SPS measures are sometimes referenced by Members in the SPS Committee, for example when raising concerns about the measures applied by other countries, however the primary focus remains on trade. Most critically, gender is almost never mentioned.

Reviewing the minutes of the 25 meetings of the SPS Committee held over the period March 2010 to March 2018 reveals that the words 'gender' or 'women' occur a total of four times overall. Two of these four occurrences relate to the nature of SPS measures being applied by a WTO Member State; namely, French labelling provisions for BPA in food contact materials out of concern for the potential risks to pregnant women and young children, and Japanese maximum residue levels (MRLs) for pesticide that take account of the likely dietary intake of both men and women. The two further references to women are part of reports on SPS-related technical assistance, namely the need to specifically focus on women (by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF)) and the fact that technical assistance projects (implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC)) had benefited women.

⁶⁶ Whilst national institutions responsible for the promulgation of trade-related SPS measures have a role to play in recognizing and prompting the importance of gender issues, arguably leadership for this needs to be provided at the international level.

⁶⁷ Over the period 1995 to 2017, a total of 434 specific trade-related SPS measures were raised by WTO Member States (G/SPS/GEN/204/Rev.18).

A further indication of the limited extent to which gender issues are considered by the SPS Committee is provided by the inventory of specific trade concerns that are raised by WTO Member States, that is maintained by the SPS Secretariat.⁶⁸ This inventory provides a summary of the nature of the respective SPS measure and the concerns raised. Within the entire inventory that covers the period 1995 to 2018, the words 'gender' and 'women' occur once; related again to French labelling requirements for BPAs in food contact materials.

The functioning of the SPS Committee, of course, very much reflects the text of the SPS Agreement, and the rights and responsibilities that it enacts on WTO Member States. The agreement itself makes no mention of the socio-economic impacts of trade-related SPS measures, including the impacts on women.⁶⁹ Whilst the SPS Agreement does recognise that low and middle-income countries can face challenges in complying with trade-related SPS measures, and furthermore in complying with their responsibilities under the Agreement, these concerns relate to weaknesses in the SPS capacity of these countries. More generally, whilst Article XX of the GATT enables Member States to take measures in pursuit of public policy concerns, even where these may violate their WTO obligations, no specific mention is made of sustainable development considerations, including gender (Montour, 2014).⁷⁰

Reflecting the routine business of the SPS Committee, the responsibilities and expertise of

delegates largely lie with technical aspects of food safety, plant health or animal health, and/or trade. In the case of larger WTO Member States, the delegation can consist of multiple members. Rarely, however, do delegations include individuals with expertise and/or responsibilities specifically related to the impacts on sustainable development of trade-related SPS measures, and women in particular. This represents a weakness of the SPS Committee as a forum for considering the gender issues associated with trade-related SPS measures, in terms of its limited access to expertise on gender.

Looking to the future, the SPS Committee could be the forum for a discussion on gender issues associated with trade-related SPS measures. Furthermore, the SPS Committee could be instrumental in promoting gender-mainstreaming in the promulgation of national SPS measures, and in the provision of SPS-related technical assistance that takes account of gender in its design and implementation. Achieving such a marked shift in the proceedings of the SPS Committee will require sustained leadership by the more influential WTO Member States; for example, by consistently raising gender issues on a case-by-case basis, applying concerted pressure for gender to become a regular agenda item, and including gender specialists in their national delegations. As already mentioned in the first chapter of this publication, a first step towards scheduling such a discussion has been taken by Canada, that has proposed holding a thematic workshop on Gender as part of the 8th Triennial review of the WTO TBT Committee.

3.6.2 International Standards-Setting Organisations

The WTO, through the SPS Agreement, promotes the harmonisation of SPS measures as a means of minimising their trade impacts. Specifically, the Agreement encourages countries to base their

national SPS measures on the international standards, guidelines and recommendations of the international standards-setting organizations (ISSOS), where these exist; namely the Codex

⁶⁸ See the various revisions to G/SPS/GEN/204.

⁶⁹ Note that the impacts of poverty are seen disproportionately amongst women (for a review see Gornick and Boeri, 2016).

⁷⁰ Under Article XX, the justification for a measure taken by a Member State must be specifically listed in Article XX.

Alimentarius Commission (CAC), International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Whilst countries are permitted to apply measures that are not based on international standards, in such cases they must provide scientific justification for doing so. *De facto*, national SPS measures that are based on international standards are considered to comply with the SPS Agreement and are unlikely to be challenged through the WTO. In this way, the ISSOs play an important role in the global governance of trade-related SPS measures.

The CAC is an intergovernmental body responsible for establishing international standards, guidelines and recommendations for food safety and quality. A series of specialised technical committees drafts new or revised international standards that are then put forward for adoption by the CAC. Within the CAC, each member has one vote, although most decisions are made on the basis of consensus. A number of sectoral, professional, consumer and other organizations are observers to the CAC, but do not have a vote. These organisations can raise issues within the CAC, although are subordinate to the official delegations of member states.

International standards and guidelines for plant health are established by the IPPC. The governing body of the IPPC, that is attended by official representatives of Contracting Parties to the Convention, is the Commission of Phytosanitary Measures (CPM). The CPM meets annually at FAO headquarters in Rome; it is at this meeting that IPPC standards and guidelines are adopted.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) is the intergovernmental body responsible for establishing international standards and recommendations for animal health. A series of specialist technical commissions is responsible for drafting new or revised standards, that are then ratified by the OIE General Assembly. The General Assembly meets annually and consists of official delegates of OIE member countries. Most of these official delegates are the chief veterinarian in their respective country.

Given the critical role played by the ISSOs in the global governance of trade-related SPS measures it is concerning that gender issues appear to play only a minimal role in their day-to-day operations, and thus in the promulgation of international standards, guidelines and recommendations. On the one hand, women are significantly under-represented in national delegations to meetings of the ISSOs. On the other, gender issues are rarely discussed in the process of approving new or revised international standards and other measures.

Taking the CAC as an example, women represented the minority of official delegates to the annual meeting of the Commission over the period 2012 to 2018. Women were particularly under-represented in the delegations of low and lower middle-income countries, accounting for less than 35 per cent of delegates throughout the period 2012 to 2018. This contrasts to high and upper middle-income countries for which there was almost parity between men and women in the gender composition of national delegations.

Without directly observing the proceedings of the various committees of the ISSOs it is difficult to judge the extent to which gender issues are considered in the drafting and adoption of international standards, guidelines and recommendations. A search of the official record of meetings of the CAC, CPM and General Assembly of the OIE, however, suggests that gender issues are rarely discussed. Thus, the words 'gender' and 'women' are recorded not even once in the reports of meetings of the CAC and CPM over the period 2010 to 2018. There is reference to 'women' a total of eight times in the reports of meetings of the OIE's General Assembly over the same period. In almost all cases, references to 'women' or 'gender', however, refer to presentations by donors that recognise the importance of women within the global livestock sector. Whilst this is an important first step, there is no record of gender issues being discussed with respect to the adoption of specific OIE standards or recommendations.

The minimal consideration of gender in the proceedings of the ISSOs is reflected in the lack of gender specialists amongst delegates to meetings of the CAC, CPM and General Assembly of the OIE. Taking the CAC as an example once again, in only four meetings of the Commission over the period 2010 to 2018 was there even a single delegate from a government ministry or department with explicit responsibility for women's issues.

Whilst the work of the CAC, IPPC and OIE will rightly remain focused on scientific and technical aspects of the risks to food safety and plant and animal health, there are compelling reasons for gender to be mainstreamed in their day-to-day

work.⁷¹ It is logical for trade-related SPS measures, and in particular international standards, guidelines and recommendations, to be more gender-sensitive. That is, rather than focusing efforts to address gender issues solely on mitigating the detrimental impacts on women of trade-related SPS measures once they have been implemented. Again, leadership will be needed on the part of the more influential ISSO members to ensure that gender issues are on the agenda of these organisations. It will also require that gender specialists accompany food safety, plant health or animal health scientists on member delegations.

3.7 Conclusions and Recommendations

Trade-related SPS measures have an important role to play as part of global efforts to achieve sustainable development under Agenda 2030. This is even more the case given that the impacts of trade-related SPS measures, most notably for the benefit of low and middle-income countries, whose exports are heavily concentrated in agricultural goods and commodities.

Whilst efforts have been made to address gender issues in the design and implementation of projects and programmes aimed at enhancing SPS capacity in low and middle-income countries, these remain the exception rather than the rule. There has been limited engagement, furthermore, with gender issues in the global governance of trade-related SPS measures.

As part of broader-based efforts to promote and facilitate global sustainable development through Agenda 2030, there is a compelling case for gender mainstreaming in the context of trade-related SPS measures, especially as these impact low and middle-income countries. Towards this end, and arguably most critically, gender issues need to be mainstreamed in the promulgation of national trade-related SPS measures; in this way,

efforts can be made to avoid any involuntary adverse impacts on women of new or revised measures. Simultaneously, gender considerations also need to be discussed as part of the global governance of trade-related SPS institutions. Including in the WTO and in the ISSOs.

It is with respect to SPS capacity-building that, arguably, more immediate steps can be made towards gender mainstreaming. The aim in so doing would be to align the design and implementation of SPS capacity-building projects and programmes with the most pressing needs of women in complying with trade-related SPS measures. Such efforts should be guided by emerging experiences and notions of 'best practice' not only from capacity-building specifically related to SPS measures, but regulations and standards more generally. In so doing, capacity-building activities would not only act to mitigate the most pressing gender issues associated with trade-related SPS measures, but also ensure overall coordination of the efforts needed to implement the gender dimension of Agenda 2030.

⁷¹ Indeed, the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) is currently considering the guidelines of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on standards and gender. Furthermore, ISO is one of the organisations that has pledged to be an International Gender Champion (see: <https://genderchampions.com>).

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

The overall conclusions of the three chapters of this publications can be broadly summarized as follows.

There is first of all a need to substantially increase the participation of women in the technical committees that develop any and all kinds of standards, including at national, regional and international levels, and for standards bodies with governance models of different kinds. To build up women's participation, further capacity building activities for the benefit of women so that they are enabled and empowered to take part in these activities should be enhanced.

Second, methodologies for the evaluation of the gender-responsiveness of standards, of the standards development process and of the governance model of standards bodies need to be developed. Standards bodies operating under different governance models should be encouraged to participate in the activities of the international community such as the WP. 6 "Gender Responsive Standards Initiative" so as to

create guidelines that can be applied across different sectors, and that are compelling for standards bodies of different kinds.

Third, there is a critical need to enhance women's capacity to comply, especially with VSS standards and trade-related SPS issues, in view of the relevance of the products that fall under the broad scope of these standards for low-and-middle-income economies.

And finally, the gender dimension of ESG reporting needs to be much strengthened so that companies and financial institutions are made more accountable of any violations of the commitments that the international community has made for the elimination of discrimination in everyday lives and at the workplace.

Based on the findings and analysis presented in this publication, we make the following recommendations for standards systems and related stakeholders, including policy makers and international organisations.

4.1 General Recommendations for all Actors

- Take a strategic approach to the integration of a gender lens in standardization, based on thorough analysis of the root causes of inequality.
- To give it legitimacy, frame the approach around global conventions and frameworks for women's rights, particularly the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 5 and SDG 8),
- Engage in multi-stakeholder dialogue and action around gender equality, bringing together business and civil society actors with standards bodies, policy-makers and international organisations, as well as academia, to develop and implement holistic solutions to entrenched gender equality which is not easily addressed through technical specifications alone.
- Promote and support fora for this dialogue like the UNFSS and the UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, and take up emerging results in policies and business practices.
- Further the integration of gender considerations in environmental, social and governance (ESG) standards that are the foundation for non-financial performance reporting. Encourage companies and financial institutions to report on gender indicators and lobby investors to require this of the companies they invest in.

4.2 Recommendations for Standards Bodies (Independent of their Governance Structures)

- Ensure senior level commitment to gender equality in the standards body and adequate resources to transform this commitment into action.
- Integrate a gender perspective across all components of the standards system, including governance, standard setting, quality infrastructure institutions, technical assistance and awareness-raising activities. Develop standard clauses and guidance in accordance with the gender contexts of the countries and sectors where the standard is applied.
- Ensure that the interests of women are represented by credible organisations (such as women’s rights organisations and women’s divisions of trades unions) in key forums and processes, including governance structures, standards development and monitoring, paying attention to differences among women within categories such as producers, workers, business owners and consumers.
- Take proactive measures to ensure safeguarding and address discrimination and sexual harassment for staff performing their duties and stakeholders participating in any of the phases of standards development and implementation.
- Work across limiting silos based on business models, geographical mandates, and sectoral focus to effectively tackle gender inequality as a priority issue for the whole standards community.

4.3 Recommendations for Donors, Policymakers, Academia and International Organisations

- Donors should continue and enhance their support for women’s participation in the meetings of standards bodies, including by strengthening their negotiating skills and enabling them to further progress towards being in positions of influence in standards bodies.
- Donors and international organizations should prioritize capacity-building activities specifically targeting women-led businesses and women small-scale producers aimed at enhancing their capacity to comply with standards of different kinds, especially in low and middle-income countries.
- Donors and international organizations should support research on gender issues and constraints relevant to the development and implementation and application of standards, which can then be taken into consideration by standards bodies. devising best practice for the collection of sex disaggregated data
- Policymakers should take into consideration the role of standards in addressing inequalities and reaching those who are most excluded or exploited in markets (women in informal work for example), and the risk of standards reinforcing gender norms and inequalities that already exist and creating barriers to inclusion.

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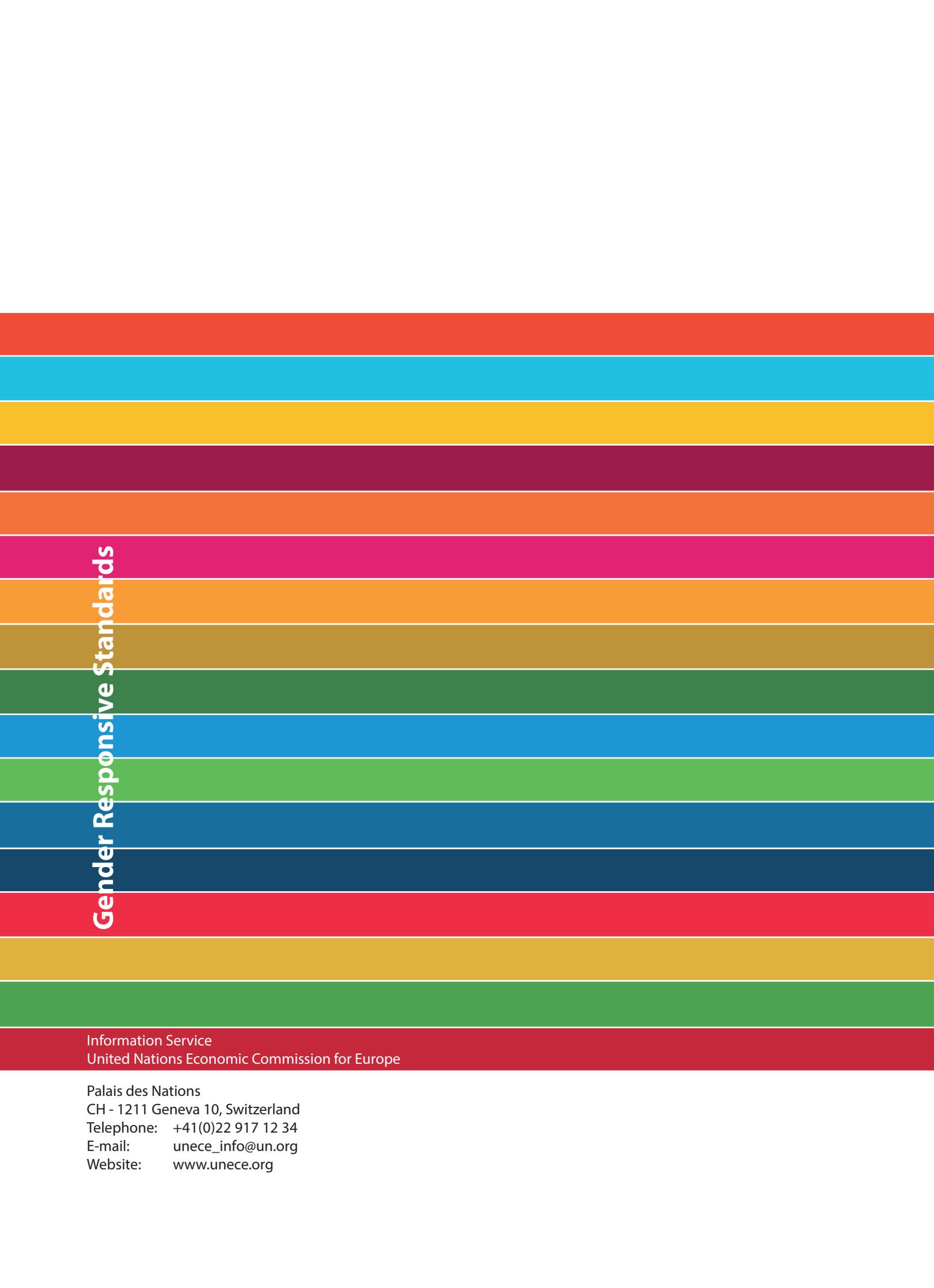
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