

# Global Distributors Collective



VALUE  
FOR  
WOMEN

## Gender inclusion and last mile distribution

15<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Photo credit: Pollinate Group



**Practical  
ACTION**

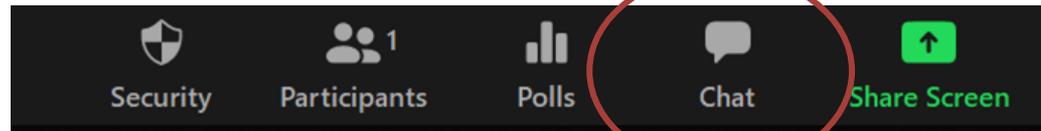
**HYSTRA**  
hybrid | strategies consulting

**bop  
inc**

The GDC is hosted by Practical Action, alongside implementing partners Hystra and Bopinc

# Agenda

- Scene-setting
- How and why can **using gender lens solve business challenges** and drive business and social impacts?
- Overview of strategies
- Q&A
- Wrap up and close



# What do we already know?

- Last mile distributors are well-positioned to help further gender inclusivity.

Target  
customers at  
the last mile

Female sales  
staff

- Barriers exist that prevent more distributors from adopting increasingly inclusive practices.

High short-term  
costs involved

Few resources,  
tools and  
guidance



VALUE  
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## What we do

**Value for Women** is a specialized advisory firm that helps organizations advance gender inclusion.

We work at the intersection of **gender, business, and investing.**



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# SMEs and Gender Inclusion

1. Why should companies promote gender inclusion?
  2. What are the specific steps they could take?

# What do we mean by “gender inclusive business”?

Businesses that are **recognizing constraints faced by women** (i.e., as **employees, clients, suppliers, distributors**, etc.), and trying to address these constraints to **unlock their economic potential**.



## Ways that LMDs can support gender inclusion: Two entry points



## Leadership and Workforce Level

Why is investing in women as employees and leaders good for the business?

- Higher than average performance in terms of revenues and profitability.
- Higher employee satisfaction and retention.
- Increase of available talent pool.
- Improved employee performance and productivity.
- Improved innovation capability.

## Market Level

Why is investing in women as customers good for the business?

- Tap into an underserved market resulting in increased revenues and higher market reach.
- Better alignment of company products and services to client needs and wants, resulting in better client satisfaction, retention, and referrals.
- Improved brand recognition.

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# Gender Inclusion Strategies

## For Last Mile Distributors

# Goals of Gender Inclusion Strategies

All strategies in this presentation seek to simultaneously advance two goals:

- ★ **Improved gender inclusion**
- ★ **Improved business performance**

# What each strategy covers

1. **The business challenge**
1. **The strategy**
1. **Potential business and gender impact**
1. **Time and resource requirements**

# Framework for evaluating gender strategy impacts and required resources

Expected Impacts		Resources Required (Estimate)		
<i>Business Impact</i>	<i>Gender Impact</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Cash Expenses</i>	<i>Proximity to Current Business Practice</i>
<b>Low:</b> Minimal business impacts	<b>Low:</b> Minimal gender impacts	<b>Low:</b> 1-2 hrs/week	<b>Low:</b> <500 USD	<b>Low:</b> Minimal departure from current practices
<b>Medium:</b> Moderate business impacts	<b>Medium:</b> Moderate gender impacts	<b>Medium:</b> 3-4 hrs/week	<b>Medium:</b> <10K USD	<b>Medium:</b> Slight departure from current practices
<b>High:</b> Significant business impacts	<b>High:</b> Significant gender impacts	<b>High:</b> 5+ hrs/week	<b>High:</b> >10K USD	<b>High:</b> Significant departure from current practices

# DATA STRATEGY

## Strategy I: Sex-disaggregated data collection and tracking

### Summary of Business Challenge

- Lack of sex-disaggregated data related to employees, customers and suppliers/vendors
- Gaps in the understanding of gender-specific performance challenges, retention issues, customer preferences & pain points

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Use/develop tools to disaggregate existing data
- Systematically track sex-disaggregated data on metrics related to employees, customers, suppliers and producers

### Expected Impacts

**Business Impacts**

**High**

**Gender Impacts**

**High**

### Expected Costs

**Time Investment**

**Low**

**Cash Investment**

**Low**

**Departure from current business practices**

**Low/Medium**

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# Human Resources Strategies

# HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY

## Strategy 2.1: Strengthening recruitment of women field agents

### Summary of Business Challenge

- Low representation of women among sales agents due to social norms/barriers
- Intense demands of the sales agent role deter women from applying
- Men tend to refer other men for the sales agent position
- Missed customer opportunities

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Build an understanding of the barriers women sales agents face
- Review training materials
- Based on the findings, address these issues by adapting the content of recruitment messaging and recruitment channels

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**Medium/High**

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**Gender Impacts**

**High**

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### Expected Costs

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**Time Investment**

**Medium**

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**Cash Investment**

**Medium**

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**Departure from current business practices**

**Medium**

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# HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY

## Strategy 2.2: Strengthening retention of existing women field sales agents

### Summary of Business Challenge

- Low retention rate of women among sales agents due to safety, mobility constraints, etc
- The low retention rate may result in missed opportunities with customers

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Build an understanding of the barriers women sales agents face
- Review training materials
- Address these issues by providing accommodations to women sales agents (like transit options), conduct sales at strategic locations
- Training and recruitment of agents

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

---

**Gender Impacts**

**High**

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### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Medium**

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**Cash Investment**

**Medium**

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**Departure from current business practices**

**Medium**

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# Strategies to Support Sales Agents

# SALES AGENT STRATEGY

## Strategy 3.1: Gender-focused training & skills transfer on best practices and effective sales pitches

### Summary of Business Challenge

- Women sales agents are often more effective at marketing/selling products
- Businesses don't capitalise on this by studying best practices & effective pitches or creating processes for peer-to-peer transfer of skills

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Collect information on effective practices and pitches from top-performing agents (often women)
- Study the data to gain insights on best practices and effective pitches
- Facilitate transfer of skills between agents, develop scripts for pitches, decide training content

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

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**Gender Impacts**

**Medium**

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### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Low/Medium**

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**Cash Investment**

**Low**

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**Departure from current business practices**

**Low/Medium**

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# SALES AGENT STRATEGY

## Strategy 3.2: Operational support for sales activities in the field

### Summary of Business Challenge

- Women sales agents face gendered constraints in carrying out sales activities (mobility challenges, limited time availability, etc.)
- Impacts sales performance/ability to hit targets

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Provide operational/logistical support to women sales agents, (transportation allowances or reimbursements, company transportation, etc.)

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

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**Gender Impacts**

**High**

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### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Medium**

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**Cash Investment**

**Medium/High**

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**Departure from current business practices**

**Medium**

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# Results we have seen before:

## Case study of a Sales Strategy from Shell Foundation Pilot

- **BUSINESS OVERVIEW:** India-based company selling household use clean energy products via direct sales force (or both men and women agents), to low-income customers in rural India
- **BUSINESS CHALLENGE:** Women sales agents not meeting sales goals
- **GENDER DIAGNOSTIC FINDINGS:** Women sales agents faced operational challenges male peers did not - specifically:
  - (1) access to capital to purchase Demonstration Kits for use during sales, and
  - (2) mobility restrictions due to cultural and security issues, limiting the number of customers women agents can reach

# Results we have seen before:

## Case study of a Sales Strategy from Shell Foundation Pilot

### INTERVENTION (STRATEGIES) TESTED, RESULTS and KEY LEARNINGS:

**Strategy 1:** Providing access to capital for women agents to purchase demo kits for use during sales

- **Results:** Avg. of **85% increase** in sales by participating direct sales agents
- **Key Learning:** Up-front investment to address women's needs lead to ROI-positive results for the company

**Strategy 2:** Training conducted and logistics designed to allow women to sell in group settings (ie. at schools, bus stops, markets) instead of being limited to door-to-door sales

- **Results:** Avg. of **73% increase** in sales by participating direct sales agents
- **Key Learning:** Core sales methods may need to differ for men and women to address cultural/security challenges

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# Digital Marketing and Sales Strategies

# DIGITAL MARKETING AND SALES STRATEGY

## Strategy 4.1: Social media user engagement analysis

### Summary of Business Challenge

- COVID-19 has hit sales activities in the field for sales teams
- No systematic tracking of gender-specific engagement with marketing posts on social media/digital platforms
- Missed opportunities for improving sales through these platforms

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Track gender-specific engagement with product posts on social media and digital platforms
- Analyse the gendered preferences, interests and buying patterns of customers/users
- Improve targeted marketing online

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

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**Gender Impacts**

**Medium**

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### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Low**

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**Cash Investment**

**Low**

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**Departure from current  
business practices**

**Low**

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# DIGITAL MARKETING AND SALES STRATEGY

## Strategy 4.2: Targeted marketing & sales strategies for social media/digital platforms

### Summary of Business Challenge

- Missed opportunities to develop targeted marketing strategies for women customers
- Opportunity to improve sales through digital platforms during and after COVID-19

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Develop gender-specific messaging and marketing content targeting women for social media platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp and Instagram

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

---

**Gender Impacts**

**Medium**

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### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Low**

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**Cash Investment**

**Low**

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**Departure from current business practices**

**Low**

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# DIGITAL MARKETING AND SALES STRATEGY

## Strategy 4.3: Social media/digital marketing and sales by agents

### Summary of Business Challenge

- COVID-19 has exacerbated gender-specific challenges faced by women sales agents
- Impacts ability to meet sales targets
- Hits the company's overall sales and revenues

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Facilitate access to smartphones and digital marketing platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook for women agents
- Provide training and support in conducting sales activities online

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

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**Gender Impacts**

**High**

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### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Medium**

---

**Cash Investment**

**Medium/High**

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**Departure from current business practices**

**Medium**

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# Customer-Focused Strategies

# CUSTOMER FOCUSED STRATEGY

## Strategy 5.1: Customer preferences tracking and analysis

### Summary of Business Challenge

- Companies often fail to systematically track/collect data on gender-specific customer preferences, needs, etc.
- A missed opportunity to better market products to different segments, improve product uptake, etc.

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Undertake customer surveys with the help of sales agents to systematically track this data
- Use insights to develop targeted marketing strategies, optimise product development, etc.

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

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**Gender Impacts**

**Medium**

---

### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Low/Medium**

---

**Cash Investment**

**Low/Medium**

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**Departure from current business practices**

**Low/Medium**

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# CUSTOMER FOCUSED STRATEGY

## Strategy 5.2: Customer education and post-sales support

### Summary of Business Challenge

- No systematic tracking/collection of data on gender-specific customer pain points
- Missed opportunity to improve customer education at the point of sales

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Conduct a short customer pain point survey with women and men customers, disaggregating responses
- Use these insights to inform customer education undertaken by sales agents at the time of a sale

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

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**Gender Impacts**

**High**

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### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Low**

---

**Cash Investment**

**Low**

---

**Departure from current business practices**

**Low/Medium**

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# CUSTOMER FOCUSED STRATEGY

## Strategy 5.3: Customer repayment/debt collection

### Summary of Business Challenge

- Lack of understanding of any specific challenges related to debt repayment for women customers
- Challenges in customer interactions around debt collection for women agents

### Summary of Proposed Strategy

- Conduct a light-touch customer survey to understand the different challenges that women in fulfilling regular payments
- Tailor repayment plans/solutions for them accordingly
- Provide women agents with training on debt collection best practices & tackling challenges women may face

### Expected Impacts

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**Business Impacts**

**High**

**Gender Impacts**

**High**

### Expected Costs

---

**Time Investment**

**Low/Medium**

**Cash Investment**

**Low/Medium**

**Departure from current business practices**

**Low/Medium**

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# Q&A with Value for Women

## Poll time!

- ❖ Where do you see most scope to implement similar strategies within your business?
- ❖ What would you need in order to implement these strategies?

## Interested in learning more? Links to relevant publications

VfW has been designing, testing and measuring the impact of intermediaries' (such as donors and investors') and investees' approaches for gender inclusion in clean energy SMEs and climate smart agribusinesses and with a series of partners, (Shell Foundation, Walmart Foundation, Root Capital, Vuna/DfID UK, and AlphaMundi Foundation):

Relevant examples include:

- [Gender Inclusion in Clean Energy SMEs](#)
- [Investment in Women's Agribusinesses](#) of Root Capital
- [Climate Smart Agriculture](#) of how SGBs can integrate gender into

# What next?



Photo credit: Bopinc

- Summary document and recording
- Gender strategies webinar with GDC members, early 2021
- Credit risk management workshops coming up

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**Thank You!**