What are the effects on women's employment of improving gender policy and practice in large private sector companies?

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Overview

Initiatives to improve gender policies and practices in the workplaces of large companies are driven in part by objectives to improve gender equality per se, and in part by the improved business outcomes which can result from better gender diversity among management and workers, and through better working conditions. Improved working conditions can lead to business benefits via several routes: reduced administrative costs of absenteesim; better staff retention; and the improved productivity that results from keeping experienced staff at work. The ILO/IFC Better Work programme in the garment sector clearly found better conditions were associated with these benefits in several country contexts. Factories involved in the Better Work programme also generally saw declining gender pay gaps, in some cases despite a decrease in the average hours worked by women.

Achieving business benefits through improved gender practices involves addressing the several domains in which women experience contraints and disadvantages at work. Better Work and other initiatives have found that it is important to work simultaneously in a number of areas. These include addressing sexual harassment in the workplace; introducing inputs to support women in balancing domestic and work responsibilities; improving internal communication; supporting women in leadership; and generating gender-disaggregated information about the company.

Sexual harassment at work is a key issue to address as it can result in stress, demotivation, decreased job satisfaction, and compromised teamwork, and associated business costs. Training supervisors in awareness and skills has been found by Better Work and others to be an effective response. However, some company policies – such as incentive structures – open the space for abuses of power on the part of supervisors. Better Work found that 'misaligned incentives' or policies linking workers' but not supervisors' pay to production targets were significant drivers of sexual harassment. Other companies have found that enabling women to speak up – such as by creating groups in which women are represented, or by complaints mechanisms – has also been an important feature of addressing sexual harassment.

> ***Better Work studies revealed that sexual harassment is most common in factories where workers and supervisors have 'misaligned incentives', opening the space for abuses of power. Specifically, when workers are paid by the piece, and when supervisors are paid a fixed salary,incentives are mis-aligned. Workers in Haiti who reported that they – but not their supervisors – received a pay bonus if their daily production target was met were 25% more likely to report that sexual harassment was a concern. Conversely, in Jordan workers were less likely to be concerned with sexual harassment if their supervisor's pay was linked to production efficiency.***
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> ***When a factory's pay scheme is misaligned, supervisors lack incentives to improve the efficiency of their production line, but are also empowered to monitor, assess and report on workers in ways that will determine worker's productivity bonuses, allowing scope for them to exercise this power by forcing them into sexual encounters. When supervisors are also incentivized to maximise efficiency concerns with sexual harassment reduce. Supporting this explanation, the study also found that sexual harassment concerns are higher during the low season and lower when production pressures are high (ILO 2016).***

Balancing domestic and work responsibilities: Initiatives helping women to balance their domestic responsibilities with paid work can have a dramatic effect on staff turnover and absenteeism, and bring associated business benefits. A variety of evidence shows child-care provision at work or support by companies can help women into work in the first place, improve retention of women; and reduce absenteeism. Other reported benefits of child-care include reduced accident rates and greater peace of mind and focus among staff. Mixing direct child-care with other child-friendly policies – such as 'bring your child to work' policies – has also worked well in some cases. Health care availability at work, especially for reproductive health, can be an important input supporting women, and there is some evidence – for instance from Bangladesh – that it reduces both absenteeism and staff turnover.

Improving internal communication and relationships, particularly between supervisors and workers, has been shown to create business benefits. Efforts to improve communications can also be vehicles for more effective communication of gender policy. Gender awareness training, especially at middle management levels, has been found in some cases to be an important catalyst for improving relations between supervisors and women workers and can support productivity. Experience suggests that trainings that work towards specific personal commitments and plans are most effective.

Training to improve supervisors' ability to manage their responsibilities using good communication and improved relationships rather than enforcement were very effective in the Better Work programme. However, results varied according to supervisors' personalities and beliefs as well as particular factory contexts. When supervisors believed that intelligence is not fixed, for example, and felt supported by their managers in the changes, results were more significant.

Consultative committees: When they represent women in numbers reflective of the overall workforce, committees bringing together workers, trade unions and managers are useful vehicles of improved internal communication and working conditions. Committees specifically focused on gender issues have also been used successfully. In Better Work, workers in factories where a Committee was present reported less verbal abuse, less dizziness and restlessness among other improvements and were associated, along with supervisor trainings, with 22% increases in productivity. Factors contributing to worker's positive perceptions of Committees included:

- Committee members adequately represent the workforce and are freely chosen.
- The Committee holds regular meetings.
- Training is provided for Committee members.
- Some recommendations from the Committee are incorporated into managers' decisions.

Supporting women in management: Gender diversity in company leadership has been shown to bring business benefits. Focusing on supporting women middle managers can fulfil a dual role of providing role models for other women while also constituting a resource pool to feed into senior leadership. While mentoring systems are important tools for facilitating women's leadership, more direct 'sponsorship' of potential women leaders has also been advocated.

Inititatives addressing safety: Although relatively little information is available on the use of employer-provided worker transport to improve women's employment, a few employers have initiated such services to address safety issues.

Gender information systems: Creating gender-disaggregated data collection systems can provide a baseline/situation analysis of women in the workplace. It can also track improvements against gender related targets and provide a basis for evidencing business related benefits of these improvements.

At a minimum, IFC recommends collecting gender disaggregated data on the following:

- Overall numbers of workers.
- Numbers of workers in different types of positions.
- Numbers in management.

- Workers recruited.
- Direct employment vs indirect employment.
- Employment status (part-time/full-time/temporary/seasonal/permanent).
- Employee retention rates (voluntary departures).
- Employee absenteeism rates (days off per month).
- Median wages/wage distribution.

Carrying out specific gender assessments can be a good starting point to identify gaps and then set targets for solving these. External reporting frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative; the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality initiative or UNDP's Gender Equality Seal programme in Latin America have also worked as incentives for companies to resource gender improvements and to gain credits for good progress.

1 Introduction

There are a number of types of drivers for investing in processes in private sector companies to improve gender policy and practices in the working life of private enterprise. The literature reflects these drivers, and the perspectives which inform them. Primary among these is the business case: as IFC (2013a) notes, key business drivers for investing in women's employment include: enhancing reputation; broadening access to talent; curbing labour shortages; improving access to new and existing consumer markets; driving up productivity and quality; and creating a more cohesive working environment. A number of studies have investigated the connection between increased women's employment and business outcomes, particularly for women in company leadership and management positions. While the evidence of how this association works in developing countries is relatively thin, Moodley *et al*. (2016) state that African companies do not show different outcomes than countries elsewhere in this respect: earnings margins of companies with at least 25% of women on their boards was on average 20% higher than the industry average. Some specific evidence is also available: in Brazil, for example, the construction company Odebrecht found that women-led teams with a majority of women workers performed electro-mechanical assembly tasks 35% more quickly than teams with a majority of male workers (IFC 2013).

> ***Initiatives to improve gender policies and practices in the workplaces of large companies are driven in part by objectives to improve gender equality per se, and in part by the improved business outcomes which can result.***

This Brief explores in more details some of the modalities through which improved gender practices have been attempted, and what employment-related outcomes can be connected with these efforts. This literature tends to arise more clearly out of a community of practice advocating for better gender equality at work, including for better working conditions in work sectors which employ large numbers of women. While this literature is also concerned with documenting evidence of improved business outcomes, the focus is on some of the domains in which better gender practices can be put in place, leading to business benefits.

2 Employing and retaining women: getting conditions right

2.1 Overall improvements in working conditions

A number of companies have found that generally improved working conditions can lead to business benefits via several routes. First, good working conditions can reduce absenteeism. Finlays Horticulture in Kenya, a flower producer which employs a large female workforce, for example, found that when the company's training package on equal opportunities and sexual harassment was operationalised, absenteeism rates dropped by 7%.

> ***Improved working conditions can lead to business benefits via several routes: reduced administrative costs of absenteesim; better staff retention; and the improved productivity that results from keeping experienced staff at work.***

This meant that the company was able to reduce its use of casual labour as well as reduce its liability for sick pay, representing considerable cost savings. Second, reduced absenteeism also boost productivity since casual labour is considerably less productive, while more stable systems also make production planning and management easier. Third, better conditions led to the retention of more experienced staff, saving around $500 for each new worker's training as well as the up to three months required for workers to reach top productivity levels (IFC 2013), alongside the costs of advertising and recruitment for new positions.

> ***The ILO/IFC Better Work programme in the garment sector clearly found better conditions were associated with these benefits in several country contexts.***

The Better Work programme, a joint initiative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) active in more than 1300 factories across the world, has been working since 2007 to improve working conditions and promote competitiveness in global garment supply chains. A 2016 review found that participation in the programme has steadily led to improved compliance with core labour standards, significantly improving working conditions at the same time as enhancing factory productivity and profitability. Impact assessment in Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Nicaragua and Vietnam all found that order sizes increased as firms joined and committed to Better Work (ILO 2016; ILO and IFC n.d). In Better Work Vietnam, for example, in factories where conditions relating to the working environment have improved, workers reach daily production targets nearly 40 minutes faster than workers in factories with worse conditions. This results in productivity and profitability: factories with better working conditions from the perspective of workers, are up to eight percent more profitable than their counterparts.

Gendered pay disparities and working hours

Better Work was also found to have a pronounced impact on gender pay disparities in Haiti, Nicaragua and Vietnam. In Haiti, women were initially working longer hours for less pay than men, but increasing compliance with Better Work saw a decrease in the average number of hours worked by women and an increase in their pay relative to men. In Nicaragua a similar pattern emerged. While these kinds of improvements started immediately following Better Work's first assessments, in Vietnam, reductions in the gender pay gap intensified with time (ILO 2016; Better Work n.d.).

The reasons for impacts on profitability and gender equality with participation in Better Work, however, are quite complex. The programme is a comprehensive combination of assessments, advisory services and training sessions conducted at the factory level. Researchers exploring the relative importance of these components found that each of these services is fundamental.

2.2 Sexual harassment policy

> ***Sexual harassment at work is a key issue to address as it can result in stress, demotivation, decreased job satisfaction, and compromised teamwork, and associated business costs. Training supervisors in awareness and skills has been found by Better Work and others to be an effective response.***

There is evidence that addressing and reducing sexual harassment in the work place is one factor that contributes to the overall better conditions associated with better retention of women, increased productivity, and declining pay gaps. As the Better Work commentary notes, for employees, sexual harassment can result in stress, demotivation, decreased job satisfaction, and compromised teamwork. Research from the IFC-led SheWorks global private sector partnership suggests that sexual harassment costs a typical Fortune 500 company $6.7 million per year in absenteeism, low productivity, and employee turnover (IFC 2016). More specifically, Better Work found declining trends in concerns about sexual harassment among women in factories participating in the programme in Indonesia, Nicaragua, Vietnam and most markedly in Jordan. In the latter, participating in the programme reduced the probability of workers being concerned with sexual harassment by 18% by the sixth year.

The Better Work programme included a prevention training which probably contributed to these effects. In earlier work by the IFC, it was found that increasing supervisor awareness and skills to deal with sexual harassment can be particularly effective (IFC 2013). Finlays Horticulture in Kenya also found that a combination of policies, training and proactive support for women workers helped to bring about change in levels of sexual harassment. The company's newly developed policy on sexual harassment was communicated throughout the organization and integrated into induction training. Supervisors' training also included a strong component on anti-discrimination and harassment.

However, a number of factors may be at work to create the space and opportunity for sexual harassment that training alone cannot address. The Better Work studies also revealed that sexual harassment is most common in factories where workers and supervisors have 'misaligned incentives', opening the space for abuses of power. Specifically, when workers are paid by the piece, and when supervisors are paid a fixed salary incentives are mis-aligned. For example, workers in Haiti who reported that they – but not their supervisors – received a pay bonus if their daily production target was met were 25% more likely to report that sexual harassment was a concern in their factory. Conversely, in Jordan workers were less likely to be concerned with sexual harassment if their supervisor's pay was linked to production efficiency.

> ***However, some company policies also open the space for abuses of power on the part of supervisors. Better Work found that 'misaligned incentives' or policies linking workers' but not supervisors' pay to production targets were significant drivers of sexual harassment.***

The study suggests that when a factory's pay scheme is misaligned, supervisors lack incentives to improve the efficiency of their production line, and are also empowered to monitor, assess and report on workers in ways that will determine worker's productivity bonuses, allowing scope for them to exercise this power by forcing them into sexual encounters. When supervisors are also incentivized to maximise efficiency, on the other hand, concerns with sexual harassment reduce. Supporting this explanation, the study also found that sexual harassment concerns are higher during the low season and lower when production pressures are high (ILO 2016).

Aside from supervisor training, creating a culture in which women feel able to speak up may also be a factor in decreasing sexual harassment. Better Work found that over repeated surveys among workers in participating factories seeking worker opinions including on sensitive topics such as sexual harassment, responses of "I don't know" or "I don't want to answer" decreased significantly since baseline, suggesting that workers became increasingly comfortable with voicing grievances. For Finlays in Kenya, it was also found that the company's gender committees help to empower women workers to speak up on a range of issues, including sexual harassment (IFC 2013).

> ***Enabling women to speak up has also been an important feature of addressing sexual harassment.***

The SheWorks initiative, working with a number of companies based in high income countries and a few in developing countries, sets out a number of steps amounting to promising practice in reducing sexual harassment (IFC 2016):

- Operationalising a clear, strong, stand-alone sexual harassment policy that gives a clear definition and gives lists and examples of prohibited actions.
- Establishing and publicising a fair, efficient and transparent complaints procedure which ensures confidentiality and security.
- Define remediation measures such as counselling, warning, training, demotion, mediation, and dismissals that are serious, tailored to the offence, and applicable to all staff.
- Conducting training and awareness raising among staff at all levels on how to recognize, prevent, and manage harassment of all kinds.
- Carrying out regular monitoring and evaluation of the policy, complaints procedure, remediation measures and trainings.

2.3 Childcare and family friendly policy

Initiatives to support women with their double burdens of domestic responsibilities and paid work can, unsurprisingly, have a dramatic effect on staff turnover and absenteeism, with knock-on effects on reduced needs for casual labour, recruitment and training costs and overall worker productivity. These initiatives range from introducing flexible working hours; paid parental leave; child care information and referral services; to offering on or off-site child care facilities.

> ***Initiatives helping women to balance their domestic responsibilities with paid work can have a dramatic effect on staff turnover and absenteeism. A variety of evidence shows child-care provision or support can help women into work in the first place, improve retention of women; and reduce absenteeism.***

This review found most evidence relating to direct child care services. Child care provision can bring women into work in the first place: a randomized evaluation of preschool provision in rural Mozambique, for instance, found that the caregiver's probability of working increased by 26% with the availability of preschool centres (Datta and Kotikula 2016). For women already working, child care can help them stay in work: for instance, at Nalt Enterprise, a Vietnamese garment factory, staff turnover fell by one third after the company established a kindergarten for workers' children (IFC 2013). In Turkey, a car component producer, Martur, found that offering child-care related benefits reduced staff turnover by about 15% – a trend that the company particularly valued because new workers require around eight months to become fully productive, and since production is team-based, weaker elements affect the whole team (IFC 2017). In Jordan, MAS Kreeda Al Safi-Madaba, found that sick leave fell by 9% in the first nine months after a workplace crèche was opened.

Some companies have found that the benefits of these types of arrangements go well beyond predictable effects on retention to impact on less expected areas, as well as in ways that are more difficult to measure. For instance, Pandurata Alimentos Ltda. (Bauducco) in Brazil has noted that childcare benefits have led to a reduction in accident rates as employees are more focused and at ease knowing that their children are safe (IFC 2016). Farm employees at Afrifresh in South Africa have reported greater peace of mind and ability to focus on their work knowing that their children are on-site and safe (IFC 2017).

At SafariCom, a telecommunications company in Kenya operating a large call centre, both women and men at the call centre and at headquarters reported improved productivity as a result of the crèche facilities because they feel more settled, concentrate better, and are more focused on their tasks. For some staff, these effects can be seen and measured, for example by tracking how many calls are answered and queuing and abandonment rates; and through customer satisfaction scores. For others, such as headquarters and management staff, these effects are less trackable, but qualitative information suggests that childcare facilities save them time and disruption during domestic emergencies (such as when existing child care arrangements falling through; or child sickness), and the company has seen rising scores in their annual staff survey on how engaged staff feel at work (Datta and Kotikula 2016).

> ***Other reported benefits of child-care include reduced accident rates and greater peace of mind and focus among staff.***
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> ***Mixing direct child- care with other child-friendly policies has also worked well in some cases.***

Some companies have offered packages of benefits to address the difficulties staff face in balancing the sometimes unpredictable nature of domestic responsibilities with work. SafariCom, where just over half of employees are women, offered a mixed bag of support: on site crèches; a 'bring your child to work' policy; additional paid maternity leave; a 'mother's shift' which offered a reduced working week at full time pay; breastfeeding rooms; a shift preference system; and an on-site doctor. In combination, the company found these were associated with a string of benefits to the company: improved punctuality, reduced absenteeism; reduced stress; better recruitment and retention; increased productivity and motivation for both men and women; and better progress against the company's own targets for numbers of women in leadership and technology roles; and towards sustainability and responsible business goals (IFC 2017).

2.4 Health care benefits

Health care benefits

Health care benefits have also been a notable contribution into creating conditions which support women in work, in particular services which focus on healthcare for pregnancy and reproductive health, though there is less evidence which ties these services specifically to business-related outcomes. Better Work, for example, reports considerable increases in prenatal care availability at work among participating factories, since these services were part of the good practices promoted by the programme. In Haiti, for instance, women accessing pre-natal check-ups increased from 6% to 26% after five years (Better Work n.d.). Similar effects were seen in Vietnam, Indonesia and Jordan – in the later, these related to both pre and post-natal services (ILO 2016). More concretely, a garment factory in Bangladesh which employed large numbers of women found that a health services programme they introduced had a $3:$1 return on investment over an 18 month period, as a result of combined savings from reduced absenteeism and staff turnover (IFC 2013).

2.5 Better internal relations

Creating a working atmosphere to support good retention and high productivity – and the associated business benefits in terms of cost savings and profitability – has also been successfully attempted through initiatives to improve internal communication and relationships, particularly between workers and management or supervisory staff. In companies in which large numbers of women are employed, such as in the garment sector, these initiatives have gender equality benefits in the sense that they can make working life more rewarding and empowering. In companies in which fewer women are employed, inputs to improve communication are often driven by objectives to communicate gender policy more effectively, in order to improve a company's ability to reap the business benefits of a more diverse workforce. In some cases, improved relationships have also been shown to have direct effects on improving productivity, alongside other less tangible benefits.

Improving internal communication and relationships, particularly between supervisors and workers, has been shown to create business benefits. Efforts to improve communications can also be vehicles for more effective communication of gender policy.

Communication for gender policy/diversity

A 2012 McKinsey survey found that support for gender diversity policies tends to dwindle at lower levels of management and that male managers tend to be less convinced of the need for them. IFC (2013) also suggest that training is particularly important in sectors which traditionally employ low numbers of women. As a result, some companies have developed training with a focus on middle management and as a tool for communicating gender policy objectives. Finlays Horticulture in Kenya, for example, found that gender awareness training was an important catalyst for improving relations between supervisors and women workers. Country Bird, a poultry and stock feed agribusiness company in South Africa, use a more general code of conduct for a similar objective of helping to embed fair treatment, and employees feel this is a valuable tool which has helped to create a unity of purpose across the company (IFC 2016).

In Chile, Anglo American Copper, developed workshops for training supervisors on gender awareness which aimed to both explain and promote the gender diversity strategy, as well to provide space for open discussion more generally. Participants were encouraged to discuss personal experiences and raise any concerns about company procedures on gender diversity. In some workshops, male supervisors were able to discuss anxieties about whether they needed to adapt their management style to manage women; women supervisors also took these opportunities to share personal experiences of working in a male-dominated environment.

Gender awareness training, especially at middle management levels, has been found in some cases to be an important catalyst for improving relations between supervisors and women workers. Experience suggests that trainings that work towards specific commitments and plans.

These workshops lead to a written "co-existence agreement" or commitments that men and women agree to take on to make life in the workplace easier. Commitments include aims such as 'I will not downplay situations that undermine respect for gender or other differences', 'I will develop empathy, by remembering to put myself in other people's shoes' (IFC 2013). These are posted around the workplace to provide a reminder of how to put policy into practice on a daily basis.

Supervisor-worker relations

With a focus on improving communication between factory supervisors and workers, the Better Work programme clearly found that training female supervisors through their Supervisory Skills Training (SST) increased line productivity by up to 22% (ILO and IFC n.d). The training also helped to lower employee turnover, reduce unbalanced production lines (where work piles up for some workers while others sit idle), and lower worker injury rates. The training took place in contexts like Vietnam, where evidence had shown that workers concerned by verbal abuse took almost an hour longer every day to reach their production targets (ILO and IFC n.d). While the association between verbal abuse and depressed productivity – and the converse – is not necessarily straightforward, IFC and ILO report that among Better Work participating factories, in factories where verbal abuse is more prevalent, revenue relative to cost declines as the number of verbal abuse reports rise.

The SST programme was implemented in Cambodia, Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Lesotho, Nicaragua, and Vietnam. It aimed to improve supervisors' abilities and confidence at work, their relationships with workers, and productivity via interactive sessions designed to teach supervisors about their roles and responsibilities, professional behaviour at work, communicating effectively with workers, and improving worker performance. Research on the programme's effectiveness (Babbitt 2016) found that the training had positive effects in supervisors' self-efficacy, attitudes towards workers, and productivity, but that these effects were moderated by variables such as supervisors' characteristics and the specific factory context. Detailed results were quite complex: training was most effective for supervisors who believed that intelligence is not fixed, and were more open to learning new skills. It was also more effective for supervisors who rejected the idea that improvements in working conditions necessarily reduce factory performance and for those who perceived buy-in for the training from their managers, and thus felt supported in implementing what they learned.

> ***Training to improve supervisors' ability to manage their responsibilities using good communication and improved relationships rather than enforcement were very effective in the Better Work programme. However, results varied according to supervisors' personalities and beliefs as well as particular factory contexts.***

The SST content covers production-specific skills and leadership and communication skills, ensuring that new skills are embedded in the context and demands of the supervisor's role – for instance, in identifying overlapping worker and factory interests and including demonstrations and practice of how to effectively assign jobs to workers and instruct them on new tasks. Supervisors learn that their ability to motivate workers will be more successful if they set good examples and build relations, listen well and build empathy, rather than attempting to motivate by force. The training takes about three days, and the methodology is very interactive, involving discussions, demonstrations, participatory exercises and role plays (Babbitt 2016).

Elsewhere, communication principles of open dialogue and employee consultation – aside from providing better insights into the workplace for all – are seen as increasing employee loyalty by suggesting that the management is interested in workplace conditions, and supportive of women's employment. (IFC 2013). Some companies have created formal and informal mechanisms to support dialogue between workers and managers. For example, Nalt Enterprise in Vietnam ensures regular liaison with the factory's trade union representative and monthly staff meetings for administrative information, while also maintaining a less formal open door policy in the HR department, so that workers can get questions answered. Supervisors may also raise workers' issues with senior management during daily production meetings.

Consultative Committees

Some companies involved in Better Work have gone a step further to set up formal groups of worker representatives, trade union representatives and managers in Performance Improvement Consultative Committees (PICCs), (Better Work n.d.). Research tracking the programme found that these have several positive benefits, particularly when women are represented on the committees in numbers reflective of the overall workforce. When women were present on the committees, workers' sexual harassment concerns were also reduced (Better Work n.d.). In combination with the SST training, this formula contributed to improved productivity by as much as 22%.

When they represent women in numbers reflective of the overall workforce, committees bringing together workers, trade unions and managers are useful vehicles of improved internal communication and working conditions. Committees specifically focused on gender issues have also been used successfully.

They also contribute to achieving better working conditions. Workers in factories where a PICC was present reported less verbal abuse, less dizziness and restlessness and improved water quality and availability – perhaps due to the focus on occupational safety and health in the early meetings of the PICCs. They are also more likely to seek help from their trade union representative. Other factors which contributed to workers' positive perceptions of the committees included (ILO 2016):

- PICC members adequately represent the workforce and are freely chosen.
- Meetings without a Better Work advisor.
- Holding regular meetings.
- Providing training for PICC members.
- Examples of recommendations from the PICC being incorporated into managers' decisions.

Managers do not always see the PICCs in positive terms and may try to undermine or undervalue the ability of the committee to solve problems. There perceptions were better, however (ILO 2016):

- When unions and women are fairly represented. Union representation is associated with increased manager's perception that conflicts can be solved.
- Among HR managers, some of whom participated in the committees.
- When workers can chose representatives freely from among multiple candidates.

Other companies have gone a step further to introduce specifically gender committees. Finlays in Kenya, for example, from 2004 started establishing committees of elected female representatives to strengthen women workers' voices on workplace issues. The company provides a training and capacity building program for elected representatives, who collect agenda items from women workers, then meet monthly with management representatives to discuss the issues. The committee has addressed issues such as breaks for breastfeeding (IFC 2013).

2.6 Mentoring for leadership

Creating a women-friendly work environment includes bringing women into work leadership positions, where they are frequently strongly under-represented. A strong case has been made for the business benefits of gender diversity in leadership; in addition, women leaders act as role models for other women, as well as helping to create a supportive working environment for women workers. IFC (2016a) makes a case for paying attention to the role of women middle managers as both playing role model roles for other women while also constituting the 'pipeline' talent pool for progression towards more senior leadership roles.

Gender diversity in company leadership has been shown to bring business benefits. Focusing on supporting women middle managers can fulfil a dual role of providing role models for other women while also constituting a resource pool to feed into senior leadership.

This review found relatively few examples of creating career progression opportunities for women in big companies in developing countries, or of guidance on supporting women in middle management. However IFC (2016) asserts that mentors and coaches are key, along with women in higher leadership positions as role models. The Centre for Talent Innovation (2015) observes regarding sponsorship programmes in relation to the SheWorks programme that women tend to be over-mentored and under-sponsored. What is needed is 'high-octane support and [advocacy] on women's behalf'. SheWorks member EY, however, is credited with creating a culture of sponsorship in which employees are encouraged to become "sponsor ready" from day one.

> ***While mentoring for leadership is an important tool, more direct 'sponsorship' of potential women leaders has also been advocated.***

2.7 Transport policies

A very few commentaries note the use of transport policies in support of workers, particularly women workers. For India, this literature is dominated by commentary on the introduction of national legislation forcing companies to provide free transport to women working on night shifts – despite this commentary, evidence of the effectiveness of these services for women's economic empowerment does not appear to have been collated. Deepthi and Sriram (2014), however, conducted a small study on the use of late night company transport at a software company in Bangalore, and why some do not use it. Reasons include that the cost was relatively high, and transport was not always available at times convenient to different shifts. They do not analyse any associations of the transport provision women's (or men's) perceptions of safety or with company productivity or retention objectives.

IFC (2013) notes that, investment in safe transport options for workers can (in principle) overcome a key physical barrier to women's employment, while also potentially benefitting men. It reports on companies in Ukraine and Thailand which provide free transport to fields or factories and transport subsidies for other workers. Surveys among workers at Continental in Thailand are conducted to provide an opportunity for women to comment on how safe they feel at pick up and drop off points. In South Africa, Country Bird has introduced night transport to prevent attacks on staff traveling home after night shift, paid for by a negotiated pay increment on staff salaries. Both men and women value this service, since the threat of attack after night shifts is experienced by all staff, and report feeling secure during and after work and confident that sexual harassment complaints will be taken seriously (IFC 2016).

> ***Although relatively little information is available on the use of employer-provided worker transport to improve women's employment, a few employers have initiated such services to address safety issues.***

2.8 Gender sensitive data systems

Commentators are clear that creating data systems which can provide clear information on the position of women in a company, as well as tracking effects of new gender policy related initiatives, can be a strong asset in further embedding gender-friendly practices.

At a minimum, IFC (2013) recommends in relation to programmes like Better Work collection gender disaggregated data on the following:

- Overall numbers of workers.
- Numbers of workers in different types of positions.
- Numbers in management.
- Workers recruited.
- Direct employment vs indirect employment.

> ***Creating gender-disaggregate data collection systems can provide a baseline/situation analysis of women in the workplace. It can also track improvements against gender related targets and provide a basis for evidencing business related benefits of these improvements.***

- Employment status (part-time/full-time/temporary/seasonal/permanent).
- Employee retention rates (voluntary departures).
- Employee absenteeism rates (days off per month).
- Median wages/wage distribution.

Gender assessments/surveys may be a good method to begin identifying gaps – such as in recruitment and promotion – as the basis for action plans to develop policy. SheWorks member Zulekha Hospitals, for example, first carried out a comprehensive gender assessment, then developed an action plan, established a baseline, and set targets to ensure that hiring managers consider qualified female candidates for all open positions and promotions. Zulekha's and other SheWorks members' experiences suggest that companies can get the maximum benefit out of gender assessments when their results are immediately analysed and acted upon. Boyner Group, one of Turkey's largest retail companies, also conducted a gender assessment to identify regions where there was potential to develop existing human resources and increase the number of women store managers and supervisors in a region with low socioeconomic development and women's labour force participation. The company immediately developed an action plan to increase the number of female store managers, and within a short time their numbers increased from 15% to 21%, and 42% of supervisors.

Collecting data to show the benefits from investing in women's employment may require some more detail, but may be part of data on productivity and performance collected by companies anyway, such as accident rates, error/reject rates and sales revenues (IFC 2013). Other types of data collection may need to be newly set up, such as maternity leave return rates; numbers of women and men in non-traditional positions; rates of promotion by promotion applications (by gender) and the gender wage gap.

External quality markers

External reporting frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), or the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) initiative, through which companies may gain wider recognition for their achievements on gender equality, may work as a motivating factor for companies to focus on gender diversity. The GRI is an established, globally-recognized framework for reporting on gender-related indicators, used, for example, by Biosev, a Brazilian sugar cane and ethanol company to report on gender in its annual sustainability report. EDGE is a global assessment methodology and business certification standard for gender equality at the workplace, launched in 2011 (IFC 2016). It uses three data sources – HR data; policy and practices information; and employee surveys – to assess critical workplace areas and examine the alignment and gaps between them so that a more effective gender equality strategy can be designed and implemented. The EDGE gender certification can be granted only by an approved third party auditing and certification body. The EDGE Certified Foundation is currently working with more than 150 companies in 40 countries and 22 industries.

The UNDP's Bureau Latin America Caribbean (RBLAC) office also developed and promoted a methodology for a establishing a Gender Equality Management System in public and private sector companies, and a certification programme to establish accreditation and recognition among participating companies – the Gender Equality Seal programme. The SEAL was operationalised in 12 Latin America and Caribbean countries between, involving more than 1500 companies. The methodology promoted to achieve SEAL certification includes steps in a number of critical areas: women in decision-making positions; detecting and eliminating gender-based pay gaps; policies to improve work-life balance; women in all company sectors; inclusive and nonsexist communication inside and outside the company; promoting zero tolerance to sexual harassment in the work-place.

> ***Carrying out specific gender assessments can be a good starting point to identify gaps and then set targets for solving these. External reporting frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative; the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality initiative or UNDP's Gender Equality Seal programme in Latin America have also worked as incentives for companies to resource gender improvements and to gain credits for good progress.***

It also outlines thematic areas for a company's gender equality policy, which also indicate areas for data collection to track changes (UNDP 2010; 2015; Woroniuk 2017; UNDP n.d.):

- Personnel recruiting and selection.
- Professional development.
- Training.
- Performance.
- Remuneration.
- Family life and work life.
- Occupational health and work risks.
- Sexual harassment.
- The projection of a fair and diverse image.

While this review found no detail on the results of the programme in terms of company experiences with the certification process or impacts on company profiles, the SEAL certification system later morphed into a gender assessment/mainstreaming tool used internally in UNDP country offices.

3 A word of caution

Although the literature drawn on here clearly does deal with company staff at different work levels and social status, there is little scrutiny or unpacking of what these levels imply in terms of differences among women – in terms of wealth status, education levels etc. Most narratives on companies working to be more gender inclusive address gender issues in a one-dimensional manner, eliding that women are in different structural positions. It is therefore not clear that normative suggestions on how to integrate women more satisfactorily into company cultures and systems would apply also to particularly poor or vulnerable women. Much depends on the nature of the enterprise and the (class/education/skills) profiles of the individuals they might seek to recruit. Motivating companies to look to increased recruitment of young women from slums in Mozambique may require additional or an adapted approach.

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