

**Building  
Bridges** for  
Women's Economic  
Empowerment



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# Engaging men to advance women's economic outcomes

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## Background

Over the years, there has been a growing interest among development actors, governments, researchers, and scholars on the role of male engagement in promoting gender equality. While the area is relatively new, [several studies](#) have contributed to the growing evidence that male involvement in various roles can significantly improve gender equality outcomes, particularly in the elimination of gender-based violence and HIV programmes. In the context of economic empowerment, data is still scanty, however, practitioners believe if strategically implemented, male engagement can lead to positive outcomes for women's economic resilience.

Under the 5 year Building Bridges for Women's Economic Empowerment Programme (funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Netherlands), Women Win has been working to promote gender equality in global supply chains in partnership with women's rights organisations (WROs). In the programme, Women Win works with WROs to identify the priorities of women working in supply chains that can contribute to their economic advancement. This is done through a participatory methodology called [Drawing the Line](#) (DTL). The priorities identified are thereafter presented to management, deliberated upon and one priority area selected to be addressed through a 'Collaborating for Impact' (CFI) project, that is co-designed by the farm management and WROs. So far, this has been done in the floriculture and tea sectors in Kenya, two of the top revenue earners for the country.



## Case Study

In partnership with [Workers Rights Watch](#) and [Haki Mashinani](#) a DTL assessment was able to identify the most important priorities for women working within the two flower farms in Naivasha. While the exercise is designed for women workers, the DTL incorporated a different approach that engaged men in the two flower farms. The exercise allowed the men to reflect on the gender gaps within their workplace that impact productivity and advancement of their female colleagues. Consequently, they identified areas they felt should be strengthened for better gender equality outcomes within the farms. The men engaged identified three out of ten priority areas that in their view would enhance gender equality. The priorities identified in one of the farms were: access to health information and health cover; support for women's work-life balance; and the provision of opportunities for women to learn new skills that would enhance their economic outcomes. Interestingly, women on the same farm also identified work life balance and skills enhancement as key priorities.

The two issues identified also correspond with the [eight building blocks](#) for women's economic empowerment. First, women spend a significant amount of time fulfilling the expectations of their domestic and reproductive roles. The disproportionate amount of time spent by women on unpaid care work has a direct and negative impact on their paid labour outcomes. It affects the amount of time spent in paid employment and quality of paid employment. Addressing unpaid care is therefore critical in advancing women's economic empowerment. Secondly, advancement to higher value positions within the value chains often is tied to skill sets and access to productive resources. In the flower value chain, women are employed on temporary seasonal contracts that offer limited opportunities for skills upgrading or promotion. This perpetuates women's continued role as temporary, seasonal labourers. Skills development through training programmes can equip women with the skills and knowledge they need to participate in GVCs, including training on economic upgrading opportunities.

Thus the outcome of the DTL suggests that men and women could sometimes share common concerns when it comes to gender equality and that engaging men can help to create a more inclusive and supportive workplace. Following the DTL exercise, CFI projects have been designed for the two farms and besides the women, specific activities that will involve men will also be carried out. Women Win believes it is important to continuously reflect on and recognise the power structures in the contexts within which we work. For example, men predominantly still hold positions of power in society and workplaces, and have traditionally perpetuated patriarchal norms. As such, instead of blaming and shaming, engaging men as allies, stakeholders, champions and co-beneficiaries presents an opportunity to challenge these norms and create a more equitable society. Transforming their roles and attitudes can help reverse harmful practices, making men engagement a crucial component of gender equality programming.

## Case Study results

By involving men in the women's economic resilience we hope to create ownership of the project and have men as key allies in achieving the following outcomes:

- ✓ **Creation of healthier workspaces and greater gender equality in society.**
- ✓ **Increased support for women workers at the workplace**  
As men may have more access to resources, networks, and decision-making power.
- ✓ **Enhanced Communication.**  
By including men in these programmes, communication, and collaboration between men and women can be improved, leading to a better understanding of each other's experiences, needs, and perspectives.
- ✓ **Greater Impact for the programme's effectiveness**  
By addressing the root causes of gender inequality and creating lasting change in workplaces.

Overall, the importance of engaging men in gender equality programming cannot be ignored. By working together, men and women can create a more inclusive and supportive workplace that benefits everyone.





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