

Women's Economic Empowerment: Mission Learning Seminar Series

LEARNING BRIEF

Seminar I: Getting to Shared Value: Creating Alignment with the Private Sector to Achieve Inclusive Development Results

The Feed the Future Advancing Women's Empowerment (AWE) activity launched a virtual **Learning Seminar Series** for USAID Mission staff in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. This brief shares some takeaways from the first of three 2-hour seminars, which was held on June 24, 2021. The seminar included 14 staff from four USAID Missions (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Colombia), a representative from the Colombian private sector, a USAID/Washington COR, and AWE staff from EnCompass, ACIDI/VOCA, and MarketShare Associates.

This Learning Seminar Series is **tailored** for Mission staff, **blends technical content** with **application to process**, and provides opportunities for **expert delivery and peer learning**. Seminar I used a virtual [knowledge café](#) approach to learning.

The seminar focused on how Missions can find alignment with the private sector by:

- Collaboratively identifying inclusive agriculture systems goals and results
- Working with implementers and private-sector partners to co-define shared value, additionality, and economic incentives for inclusion and empowerment
- Reviewing and articulating how alignment supports and achieves both Mission and private-sector goals

See the annex for Mission staff and private-sector participant contact details.

LEARNING AND EXPERIENCES SHARED

Below are some tips and resources organized by the three themes discussed in breakout groups.

Increasing Private-Sector Awareness and Capacity for Female Empowerment and Inclusion

- **Engage and build trust with the private sector early in the program cycle.** Firms may understand the importance of gendered approaches, but often do not understand how to address those considerations. Focus conversations on how to apply gender considerations and knowledge;

this will facilitate the implementation of tangible work. Build trust by listening to the firm's goals, then identify and highlight why it is important to their business model and what the benefits of engaging in gender empowerment are for them.

- **Start with a focus on what's good for business and show how gender is essential to good business.** USAID/Colombia found that sharing the one-pager, [Value Proposition on What USAID and the Private Sector Bring When We Work Together](#), based on [the USAID Private Sector Engagement Policy](#), helped communicate how it wanted to engage with the private sector. Gender activities are often programmed because USAID promotes or funds them, but to engage the private sector the activities also need to make business sense. Firms should want to use their own resources and finances, like in Honduras, where a \$3 million line of credit for female-led small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was leveraged to complement the Transforming Market Systems (TMS) activity. To increase adoption of gender and social inclusion, several Missions also provided examples of private-sector companies that invested in gender outcomes and increased their profitability or expanded into a new market segment.
- **Share your research and strategy for firms to propose their own ideas.** USAID/Colombia and USAID/Honduras stressed that sharing a **gender strategy** helps the private sector ask questions to align themselves with USAID, if possible, or signal what matters to them. USAID/Guatemala mentioned that including youth and indigenous people in the recent CDCS process helped start conversations with the private sector. USAID/Colombia found that sharing research on different geographic areas, target populations, and economic sectors helped firms respond to the public call for ideas. Some Missions have found success in asking firms to conduct a [local gender analysis](#) to understand specific needs better and using it to propose how they can benefit/profit from the engagement.

Identifying “Common Ground” for Female Empowerment with the Private Sector

- **Seek private-sector partners with goals aligned with USAID strategy.** Private-sector firms need to have an incentive to engage in partnerships; they won't do it out of “the goodness of their hearts.” This means that USAID needs to develop an understanding of where the private sector has interests and finds it beneficial to incorporate women or youth. USAID/Honduras found it useful to use a **private-sector landscape analysis** on the USAID TMS activity in the first 6–9 months of the award to help identify interest. The analysis showed there was a strong business case to work with a particular firm to engage women in its supply chain. As their interests aligned, USAID was able to show how supporting women also supported the firm's bottom line.

[Example of a Private Sector Landscape Assessment conducted by USAID/Egypt](#)

- **Leverage where there is already interest and opportunity.** Several participants stressed the importance of identifying and working with firms that already demonstrate a willingness to engage. In rural Colombia, **gender-based violence (GBV)** is a huge issue that has negative impacts that are recognized by business as well as civil society. Private-sector businesses learned that they could address GBV by making efforts to be inclusive in their business models and approaches. In Guatemala, USAID learned from the pitfalls of trying to promote women producer programs for which there is no market, pivoting instead to partner with anchor firms to increase women's inclusion in the market for demand-driven products. USAID/Guatemala also stated that closing resource gaps during the COVID-19 pandemic (such as technology access) has proved challenging, but has also provided opportunities to work with the private sector to identify ways to address women's empowerment needs like job creation, capacity-building, and nurseries/childcare services.

- **Promote broad engagement in gender analysis and gender action plans.** USAID/Guatemala manages mandatory gender analysis in co-creation by conducting it at the activity level and involving the implementing partner in a phased, participatory way. **USAID initiates the gender analysis in a phased approach** that takes about two hours and includes a brainstorming session. This starts with the use of a matrix that helps USAID and other actors identify where the gender gaps are. The implementing partner is then tasked with completing the analyses that then lead to a more focused **gender action plan**. After discussing resource gaps, there is a discussion of the gender gaps and of how the private sector is involved. USAID/Guatemala also requires that in contracts and cooperative agreements one implementing partner key personnel be a gender specialist.
- **Set targets with the private sector.** Missions recommend working with private-sector partners to determine milestones and targets for reaching and engaging women and youth. Firms should lead in setting goals and reporting on the numbers of women or youth that can be reached in what they want to do. When targets are developed in collaboration, Missions and private-sector partners can outline common agreements and goals from the very beginning, which helps both entities plan complementary activities.

Creating and Maintaining Positive Relationships with the Private Sector that Promote Inclusive Development

- **Try to engage the highest levels of a company's leadership.** Working with organizational leaders ensures that inclusive development is made a priority and carried out by the appropriate people in the organization. USAID/Honduras worked with Banco FIS' country manager, who was interested in serving women-led SMEs. The country manager already had buy-in from her superiors, and had conducted a lending pilot, with plans to expand to five and then 12 countries. By partnering with BANCO FIS, USAID/Honduras could leverage private-sector funding with the \$3 million it had already committed, in addition to plans for structuring a \$7–8 million loan guarantee for women.
- **Make the private sector feel heard and actively collaborate.** Communicate with firms early and often to let them share how they feel about activities, approaches, and processes. Use a respectful demeanor, even when their propositions are different from what USAID is seeking. This helps USAID highlight how targets and activities are beneficial for both and can allow USAID to consider different opportunities to adjust or plan future activities. In Colombia, USAID facilitated a private-sector site visit to the municipality it planned to work in, allowing firm leaders to meet women in the community and inspiring them to invest in further programming. Through this unique and organic process, USAID introduced the private sector to the communities and developed important links. Relationship management was critical in this initiative and included engaging with high-level government, resulting in a strong gender approach.
- **Create a trusting, transparent, and flexible partnership.** It is important to make private-sector firms feel they are not being judged or that they should fear sharing concerns. There needs to be space to talk about failure without judgement so that both sectors can learn from mistakes and make better decisions in the future. If that dynamic is not established, firms are less likely to communicate with USAID honestly about concerns and decreases the likelihood that firms will want to engage in future partnerships. USAID should demonstrate support and flexibility to overcome any obstacles encountered in implementation, which includes giving firms room to engage with other actors and in different types of activities and recognizing that the resources available to firms will dictate how initiatives are implemented and how they will be sustainable. Finally, firms need to have a sense of agency and feel that it is a collaborative effort to build together.

- **Monitor the implementation of the gender strategy.** Following up on the implementation of the gender strategy not only helps ensure that expectations are being met regarding the inclusion or engagement of women and youth. It also provides opportunities to reinforce how engaging women and youth can be beneficial. The private sector wants to see structures and processes that demonstrates value and return on their investment of resources and reporting progress toward specific steps and milestones shows how those resources are generating outcomes. USAID/Colombia's partner, Microsoft, felt confident in the structures put in place to manage its funds, and following the progress of the gender strategy allowed the Mission to demonstrate to Microsoft how it was getting results for its money, which led to investment in additional areas.
- **Highlight and recognize the private sector's activities, investment, and results.** Recognition usually increases motivation to continue working with USAID in current and future projects. It also helps identify new opportunities for firms through their own work and sets a vision that encourages future accomplishments.
- **Acknowledge and prepare for significant time and resource investment required for co-creation by USAID and private-sector firms.** Co-creation also takes a lot of time to ensure shared alignment. This is not just corporate social responsibility and inclusion side projects; USAID wants partners who find this to be important to their core business. In Honduras, there was a [Global Development Alliance partnership](#) with the largest coffee buyer in the country. The original partnership's goal was to reach 5,000 beneficiaries. For this initiative, USAID wanted a local, not international, partner, although it takes a lot of work and resources to build local partners' capacity.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES SHARED AND REFERENCED

- [How-To Note: Addressing Gender and Inclusiveness in Project Design](#)
- [Guide to Gender Integration and Analysis](#)
- [USAID Private-Sector Engagement Policy](#)
- [Value Proposition: What USAID and the private sector bring when we work together](#)
- [USAID/Egypt Private Sector Landscape Assessment](#)
- [Global Development Alliances](#)
- [Understanding Local Private-Sector Partnerships](#)
- [Microsoft Video on the Cacao Effect supported by USAID Colombia](#)

COMING SOON!

Seminar 2: Designing a Strategy for Private-Sector Engagement: Conducting and Using Inclusive Market Research

This seminar will explore how to develop an evidence-based vision for better performing sectors and markets that offer more opportunities for women and youth.

It will include:

- Discussions of approaches and resources for understanding how gender inequality and social exclusion affect market outcomes
- Approaches and resources for identifying market actors capable of influencing change

AWE will be sending an announcement about the next seminar in this learning series directly to your inbox. Stay tuned!

INTERESTED IN ENGAGING AWE?

[Feed the Future Advancing Women's Empowerment \(AWE\)](#) provides targeted technical assistance to Missions, implementing partners, the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, and other USAID offices to increase women's participation, productivity, profit, and benefit in agricultural systems.

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