

PRACTICAL WAYS TO ADDRESS GENDER-RELATED RISKS AT YOUR ORGANIZATION

SPM Essentials Series: Practical strategies for today's management challenges

This webinar focused on leadership's role in understanding and mitigating gender-related risks. Speakers from two financial service providers (FSPs), CREDICAMPO (El Salvador) and ODEF Financiera (Honduras) shared what steps they have taken to meet the needs of female employees and customers. As part of this work, both CREDICAMPO and ODEF Financiera participated in a training and a rapid assessment that focused on gender-related risks and opportunities, organized in partnership with Grameen Foundation and the WAGE Consortium, and are now applying lessons learned to their policies and practices.

Overview of Grameen's "Reducing Barriers" Work in Honduras and El Salvador:

Grameen Foundation leads the Reducing Barriers Initiative, which is part of the ABA-ROLI led consortium WAGE (Women and Girls Empowered). WAGE focuses on the economic empowerment of women and reducing the barriers they face in running and growing their businesses. As a first step in the initiative, Grameen studied existing barriers, which involved talking to male and female clients, interviewing staff of financial service providers (FSPs), and reviewing the legal framework in each country. Next, it implemented workshops on the dynamics of power and conflict, and gender-related challenges. Grameen organized workshops for management first but will offer them to credit officers next. CREDICAMPO and PADECOMSM Credito in El Salvador, and ODEF Financiera in Honduras, were the first to participate in the workshops.

Relevant excerpts from the Universal Standards

Standard 2B: Executive management is responsible for implementing the provider's strategy for achieving its social goals.

Essential Practice 2B2: Management makes strategic and operational decisions based on social and financial data.

- Senior management analyzes the following social performance-related data and assess risks.
 - Analysis of client protection risks
 - Analysis of outcomes for clients and their households
 - Analysis of decent work conditions

Standard 3A: The provider collects and analyzes data to understand clients' needs.

EP 3A3: The provider collects client feedback on their experiences using the provider's products and services.

- The provider conducts client satisfaction surveys. Minimum frequency: every other year.
- The provider conducts interviews with dormant and/or exiting clients to look for evidence of product design failures.
- The provider investigates whether stresses at the household level make it more difficult for clients to use its products and services.

POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND STRUCTURES CAN ALL CREATE BARRIERS TO WOMEN

Each FSP also underwent a social audit using the SPI tool, with a specific focus on gender indicators, and reflected on what policies, processes, and elements of their organizational structure could create barriers to women. They shared several examples:

- The committee in charge of interviewing job candidates was all male. Women can feel discomfort being interviewed by a group of men only.
- Female employees said they did not have the same channels within the organization to express themselves as men, and they did not always feel safe voicing their thoughts.
- The FSP's guarantee policy asked for proof of land ownership, but in its country, typically men and not women held title to land.
- Some clients felt the institution trusted men more than women when making a decision about who got a loan, and in what amount.



ACTIONS PLANNED TO BUILD ON INSIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOPS

- Formalize the policy that the FSP targets having at least half of its clients be women.
- Add women to the board of directors.
- Propose that the board of directors creates a social well-being committee to review all the cases of reported abuse.
- Consider who makes decisions about loans. Is it men reviewing women's applications?
- Update social performance indicators to include gender as a variable. For example:
 - Percent of total employees who are female
 - Percent of board members who are female
- Create products whose terms and conditions are adapted to the different characteristics of female clients' barriers and needs.
- Improve the complaints mechanism to create a better flow of communication at the level of community, at the level of branches, and at the level of employees.
- Monitor via client feedback/complaints whether clients feel reduced stress, reduced risk, and reduced abuse after the pro-gender-equality changes the FSP implemented.

ESSENTIAL TIP: Use insights gained to take action. The purpose of the workshop is not only to understand inequality and discrimination, but also to identify changes to make at different levels of the institution to achieve gender equality.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS BY WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

- Women historically have suffered from discrimination and inequality, and both can become more acute based on other factors, such as the woman's social class, ethnic group, age, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs.
- A surprise outcome of the training was how much energy it gave CREDICAMPO, as a whole team, to consider these issues and make changes.
- At a time when an FSP is granting a loan to a microentrepreneur, the FSP and the credit officer specifically are in a position of power.
- Over-indebtedness does not equal default. It is a stress that influences decisions the household makes in order to repay. If women participate in decisions about what credit the household takes on, it helps with the level of over-indebtedness.
- Do not view gender-barriers training as an expense, but as an investment. It provides insights that help the FSP achieve greater financial inclusion.
- The work of FSPs goes hand in hand with the work of governments on gender equality. Laws requiring gender equality can exist, but it is up to those working in the community, such as FSPs, to create the conditions where it is possible to apply those laws.

TIPS FOR MAKING THE GENDER WORKSHOPS A SUCCESS

- Involve management. Having the leadership team participate demonstrates to the rest of the organization the importance of the topic, and also facilitates the awareness and engagement of management.
- Train management but also train all client-facing staff.
- Create a safe environment for people to share their personal experience. It can be difficult for people to be open about discrimination they have experienced or to voice concerns they feel about the institution's current policies.
- Have experienced trainers. These sensitive conversations require expert facilitation.
- Reflect on visible forces (e.g., how she earns money, how many children she has) but also the invisible forces (e.g., prior experiences, perceptions, beliefs) that influence expectations and barriers related to gender.
- Ask participants to reflect on times when they have power and when they do not. In each circumstance, how do they act? How do they interact with others?

