



Women's Entrepreneurship Self-Check (WE-Check)

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An organisational assessment for gender-responsive business development support.

What is WE-Check?

WE-Check is an institutional self-assessment tool that guides organisations providing financial and non-financial business support to conduct a self-assessment of the extent to which they target and serve women entrepreneurs, as a means to improve their performance and enhance their impact and sustainability. With the findings of this assessment, WE-Check supports organisations to develop and pilot an evidence-based action plan.

WE-Check focuses on three key assessment areas:

- 1. Clients and Outreach:** How well does the organisation know, target and reach its clients?
- 2. Products and Services:** How well do the organisation's products/services meet the needs of entrepreneurs?
- 3. Strategy and Operations:** Does the organisation commit to gender equality and gender mainstreaming?



Woman entrepreneur in South Africa in male-dominated construction sector.

The WE-Check Process

The WE-Check process is a three-step process that takes between 6 and 12 months to complete. It is carried out by an internal team comprised of a diverse group of staff members of the organisation and is led by the organisation's senior management. The ILO and an external facilitator who is familiar with WE-Check provide guidance and support throughout the process.

Step 1: Preparation



- Engage senior management
- Define objectives
- Select team and facilitator
- Team Training Workshop
- Develop and communicate the self-assessment plan with the organisation

Step 2: Self Assessment



- Collect data
- Analyse data
- Data Analysis Workshop
- Develop WE-Check Action Report
- Validation Workshop

Step 3: Pilot and Evaluation



- Implement pilot activities
- Monitor pilot activities
- Compile lessons learned
- Adjust activities based on learnings
- Prepare for ILO recognition

Why WE-Check?

Women entrepreneurs in many countries play an important role in employment creation and income generation. However, their contributions and specific business needs and challenges are often overlooked. By providing targeted and gender-sensitive services and support, business support organisations can contribute to unlocking the potential of women entrepreneurs and improving their own business performance, while at the same time generating positive development outcomes.

1. Supporting women entrepreneurs with targeted products and services can unlock their growth potential and contribute to gender equality.

When compared to male-owned businesses with the same characteristics (e.g. education, business size, sector), women-owned businesses grow at the same rate as those led by male counterparts. The difference in their success has been attributed to gender-based barriers in accessing products, services and resources.

2. Women entrepreneurs represent a huge market opportunity for organisations providing business support and are often an under-served and untapped market.

When looking at financial services, the unmet demand for finance from women entrepreneurs in emerging markets is USD 1.7 trillion.

3. Helping women entrepreneurs succeed can generate positive development outcomes.

Small and medium enterprises are engines of economic growth and job creation, accounting for 66% of full-time employment in developing countries. Furthermore, when women entrepreneurs succeed, they are likely to invest in their families and communities, contributing to poverty reduction and improved nutrition.

What will organisations gain from the WE-Check Process?

By undertaking the WE-Check process, organisations supporting women entrepreneurs and their businesses will be able to:

- Understand the extent to which their strategies, policies, products and services are positioned to serve women entrepreneurs in their market.
- Take action by adapting products and services to fit these needs. This will allow organisations to broaden their client base, contribute to positive business and development outcomes and achieve greater institutional sustainability.
- Obtain recognition from the ILO as an organization that is committed to offering more gender-sensitive financial and/or business development services.
- Become part of a global community of practice.

Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme

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WE-Check in Practice



مؤسسة زمزم
ZAMZAM
FOUNDATION

Somalia: ZamZam Foundation

ZamZam Foundation supports people living in poverty in Somalia to restore and protect their livelihoods and build their resilience in the face of recurrent climatic and man-made shocks.

Results from the WE-Check process they carried out in 2020 highlighted the following:

- The absence of a clear definition of women entrepreneurs was hindering efforts and outreach to this category of beneficiaries.
- A lack of coordination and linkages between the different existing programmes.
- There was scope to improve ZamZam's capacity to advance women's entrepreneurship.
- Sex-disaggregated data was not being systematically used.
- A need to address the disparity between the number of females (21%) and male (79%) employees at its main office.

A few months after establishing their WE-Check action plan, the organization had made clear **strides towards greater gender equality, visibility, accountability** and better serving women entrepreneurs:

- It adopted a clear definition of women entrepreneurs which included criteria on women's decision-making within their business.
- It initiated a centralized data management system for women's entrepreneurship programmes and systematically collecting and centrally recording gender-disaggregated data from all departments.
- ZamZam's management committed to increase the number of women employees by 30%-50% by the end of 2024. Just in 2021, seven additional women were hired, including a person to address issues such as harassment complaints for both beneficiaries and staff.