



# Gender-Responsive Training Methods

## A GUIDANCE NOTE

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



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# 1 | Purpose of this Guidance Note

Robust evidence demonstrates that diversity in perspectives and life experiences will lead to a richer and more innovative learning environment. In the context of Covid exacerbating gender inequalities and a growing interest among private sector players to support greater entrepreneurial opportunities for women, this Guidance Note highlights how training initiatives can respond to women and men's different needs and learning preferences. It is intended to strengthen the skills and practice of training providers who run technical business courses for entrepreneurs—whether face to face, or virtually. The note seeks to deepen trainers' understanding of gender dynamics in the learning environment. It also provides practical suggestions and techniques that can support more inclusive participation for the female and male entrepreneurs who participate in training. As virtual instruction becomes an ever-larger part of the learning environment, there is an opportunity to ensure that evolving teaching practices are grounded in the principles of gender-inclusivity.

Although this note was initially developed for use by the Buyers and Suppliers Marketplace (BSM) in Guinea in the context of their program of support for female entrepreneurs, the guidance is broadly applicable to similar business training settings. This Note draws from and is designed to complement literature already published on this topic, particularly the IFC Grow Learn Connect (GLC) Training Guides 'Gender Supplement', by providing a quick-reference resource for practitioners. For more in-depth detail on these topics, a list of recommended further reading can be found at the end of this Note.

Gender-responsive training methods are key to ensuring that capacity building efforts in any given community or group have the potential to equally benefit all members of that group. In many contexts, women tend to be under-represented in positions of leadership—particularly in business, and in political decision-making. Growing evidence suggests that greater gender diversity and inclusion in companies, in governments and in community life can bring benefits not only to women themselves—but can also help generate far-reaching gains in terms of innovation, satisfaction, efficiency, and avoiding groupthink. In learning and educational contexts, gender-responsive training design can help to expand and enrich the pool of ideas and opinions from which all students draw, and thereby equip them to navigate the full spectrum of challenges they are likely to face in their working lives. Gender-responsive training also helps send a powerful signal to the next generation, by providing strong role models of men and women working and learning together.



It is worth noting that training is only one among several potential capacity building interventions that could be undertaken to support entrepreneurs. Female entrepreneurs, in particular, may also benefit from mentoring, coaching, and peer groups that are specifically tailored to women's unique needs. In certain circumstances, such methods can be more effective for female entrepreneurs than a traditional course-based learning approach; training providers should therefore consider the full range of potential capacity building measures at the outset before deciding whether training is the most suitable choice. Customization of technical training content is beyond the scope of this note—however for specific insights on proven methodologies for working with women-owned businesses, the World Bank's Gender Innovation Lab has documented that personal effectiveness training (focused on building agency and soft skills) can have transformative impacts on female entrepreneurs operating micro and small-scale businesses.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33250>



## 2 | Definition of Key Terms

- ▶ **Gender:** Gender refers to the social, behavioral and cultural expectations, attributes and norms associated with being male or female.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ **Gender norms:** These are standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform, within a range that defines a society, culture or community at a given point in time. Internalized early in life, gender norms can establish a lifecycle of gender socialization and stereotyping.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ **Gender neutral:** This describes a situation when no policy, language, social institution or construct (including social structure, gender role, or gender identity) distinguishes roles based on a person's sex or gender. Essentially, the term means that something is not associated exclusively with either women or men.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ **Gender inclusive:** This means that not only is there a fair representation of men and women, but that both are equally encouraged to participate. In the context of the classroom, for example, this might involve sharing opinions, voicing concerns, asking questions, or assuming roles as group leaders in group learning exercises.
- ▶ **Gender responsive:** This means that, as a design principle, the different resources, roles, expectations, challenges, needs and situations of men and women are taken into consideration. In the classroom, this impacts the design of both content and pedagogy.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ **Gender diverse:** This means representation of all genders. Diversity is often associated with inclusion, but the two are very different concepts. While diversity means male and female representation, it does not automatically speak to the unequal power, influence or status that commonly serves a single gender in the absence of inclusion.

<sup>2</sup> <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/820851467992505410/world-bank-group-gender-strategy-fy16-23-gender-equality-poverty-reduction-and-inclusive-growth>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1761/file/Gender%20glossary%20of%20terms%20and%20concepts%20.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1190>

<sup>5</sup> The definitions offered here for Gender-responsive and Gender-inclusive differ slightly from those definitions provided in other IFC training publications, such as the GLC Guides, and are for the purposes of this document only.

### 3 | What Are Gender Responsive Training Methods?

Gender-responsive training encompasses teaching methods and learning materials that consider the specific learning needs of female and male participants, and where these may differ—as well as how gender dynamics, roles and expectations can impact the learning experience. It is concerned with what is taught, who is taught, who is doing the teaching, how, where and when teaching takes place, and how learning occurs. Gender-responsive training goes beyond a simplistic view of who is present in the classroom, training venue or virtual learning platform—to instead look more deeply at ensuring participants all have equal opportunity to actively participate and benefit.





## 4 | Before Starting: Key Considerations for Planning

Prior to training starting, a *Training Needs Assessment* will be carried out. This is an opportunity to confirm that training is the most appropriate capacity building measure for the target group—and if so—to then gather data that will illuminate the gendered needs of participants and the logistical choices to consider (virtual vs in-person, schedule, format, location, technology access (if virtual), duration, and so forth) when planning the training.

**At every stage of the process, certain key considerations should be explored to ensure training is as gender-responsive as possible.<sup>6</sup>**  
**The following should be examined before training begins:**



**National and Local Market Conditions:** Assess the legal framework to understand any constraints posed to women on owning property, managing assets, or starting and running a business. Consider the kinds of challenges entrepreneurs will face, particularly female entrepreneurs—such as the degree of economic stability, growth and opportunity available in the market; the level of physical safety and security, quality and accessibility of infrastructure and logistics; and the reliability and accessibility of technology.



**Language:** Identify the languages spoken among participants and select the language of instruction that will be accessible to as many people as possible. In virtual trainings, some investment may be required to customize interactive or experiential learning that would typically be delivered face to face in local languages, into content that can be accessed online—for example through producing videos that can be viewed on a device. If interpreters (simultaneous translators) are needed, try to ensure that both men and women are hired to maintain gender balance. Be aware that men and women may have a variety of preferred languages of instruction and differ in terms of how accessible they find the content.



**Methodology:** Consider that male and female participants may possess a range of prior education and life experience. Additionally, participants will have different learning styles—for example, visual learners; aural learners; and kinesthetic learners. Try to ensure that

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed list of full considerations, please see IFC GLC Gender Supplement pg 11.  
[https://www.growlearnconnect.org/sites/wkt/files/inline-files/GuideToTraining-Gender%20Programs%20Supp\\_FIN-Linked\\_o.pdf](https://www.growlearnconnect.org/sites/wkt/files/inline-files/GuideToTraining-Gender%20Programs%20Supp_FIN-Linked_o.pdf)



the training curriculum design includes opportunities for each of these learning styles to participate. In line with theories of adult learning, hands-on, practical learning can often work well (where face to face training is possible, this is obviously easier to manage) as it enables participants to learn by doing. However even in virtual training sessions, participants can be encouraged to apply their learning via 'homework' assignments, with opportunities for feedback (group or one-on-one) structured into the schedule. Evidence suggests that hands-on learning strengthens their own sense of agency, develops the confidence to experiment, and builds collective trust through direct collaboration and mutual reliance. Such experience can help to break down preconceptions about gender stereotypes and transform views on the roles of women and men that may have existed prior to training, through requiring everyone to perform the same tasks with the same resources and encouragement.



#### **Existing Skills, Equipment, and Support for Further Learning:**

As part of the Training Needs Assessment mentioned above, gather data on the range and extent of prior education, existing skills and access to resources among the target training participants, including any variations by gender. Include not only formal education but also degree of confidence, leadership and soft skills, access to networks, and the potential for training participants' learning to be supported by families. This is especially key for women, who may face additional pressures to balance their entrepreneurial activities with domestic responsibilities and caregiving and/or pressure from family members to focus on other roles. If the goal is to make training virtual, it is key that preparation must begin with a feasibility check in the shape of brief survey of the participants to gauge their access to the requisite hardware and software to join a virtual training event, and to identify and assist male or female students who require relevant support. While many female and male entrepreneurs will be technically literate and adept, and may already be familiar with online learning, training design should account for the range of facilities participants will have available for home study. Key questions to ask will include whether participants have access to devices (either shared or individual) that they can use for learning within their homes / communities? If gaps are found, training providers should arrange to provide equipment on loan (either directly or via a third party) so that devices can be accessible to participants for the duration of the course.



**Timing and location:** In urban centers, timing and location of in-person training should be selected to take into consideration cost and safety of transport options for participants (especially female participants, who may be exposed to a greater risk at night or while traversing unsafe areas). Training organizers may wish to consider whether childcare would help to boost female attendance. When training is targeted at female entrepreneurs, shorter sessions would be less likely to impinge on their everyday business responsibilities. For virtual training, the course structure should be designed as far as possible to enable participants maximum flexibility for learning at their own pace—with opportunities given for optional 'live' group or one-on-one feedback sessions, so as not to exclude those whose responsibilities do not permit them to commit to a regular time for online study. More on this point is included in section 6 below.



**Gender participation targets:** Consider whether the training should be mixed, or women-only (in some cases, women-only training would clearly be more effective—such as on maternal health, or in cultural contexts where norms severely constrain coed learning). If training is mixed, set a target for the participation of women and youth. Setting targets for gender participation can help to normalize a cultural expectation for the future: namely that trainings should involve both men and women. In addition to quantitative targets around minimum numbers of women in the classroom, it may also be helpful to monitor meaningful participation by women through the course of training so that any barriers can be addressed in real time.



**Gender diverse trainers:** Creating a gender diverse learning environment begins with ensuring that training participants learn from both women and men. Women trainers also provide strong role models—in the eyes of all participants, but especially among young people—in terms of the equal capability and achievement of women.

### Specific considerations for community-level training:



**Gender norms and roles:** The first question to be addressed is to assess women's agency and decision-making ability to participate in training programs, and implement what is taught. Conduct prior research with the target participants to understand the gendered division of labor and how this varies seasonally, so as to organize training courses when competing demands are less pressing. Ask both men and women about the best timing and location

for training, considering their other duties such as childcare and housework. Ensure there is sufficient budget to enable training to be held within easy access of women's homes, with childcare provided if needed, facilities for breastfeeding where relevant, and adequate sanitation and toilet facilities for women.



**Literacy:** Conduct prior research with the target participants to understand whether any literacy challenges exist for men and women, and to ensure that communication is possible in local languages—hiring translators where necessary. If participants lack basic literacy and numeracy, ensure that training content is accessible (for example using visual and experiential or performance-based media like theater or television).



**Community buy-in:** Take the opportunity to talk about women's participation with community leaders to secure support and buy-in and provide assurances that the training will constitute a safe and supportive space for all participants. It may be necessary to address situations where spouses, fathers, or other male relatives are resistant to allowing females to participate in training due to perceived sensitivities over safety, or insecurities around women becoming better educated, more independent, and augmenting their earning power. Consider organizing an information session specifically targeting local men, to enable them to understand the rationale behind the training, to ensure they do not feel excluded, and ideally to gain their active support. Identify and work with local women's groups and community networks, such as churches, to make women aware of the training opportunity and encourage them to apply. Be prepared to offer information and answer any concerns and questions.



**Local trainers:** When possible, hire trainers from the local community, as this will help to reduce barriers to participation, and make training more obviously accessible in light of the cultural context. If no local candidate exists, consider using the training as an opportunity for local would-be trainers to 'shadow' and learn from those running the sessions, so they acquire the skills to lead in future. Women trainers may benefit from specific support at the teaching location, such as accommodation with safe sanitation, childcare (if they are working mothers), and peer support through connection with other female trainers.



## 5 | Before Starting: What to Consider When Designing Gender-responsive Training Materials

Training materials will be most engaging to a wide group if they are fun, interactive and relevant to the needs and experiences of the participants. Designing training materials therefore requires in-depth research with the target participants to understand their priorities, perspectives, challenges, progress to date, and areas where skills require strengthening. This research will also reveal how gender cuts across all these aspirations and constraints in terms of differences between men and women (as well as among women themselves). If possible, consider conducting focus groups, interviews or free text surveys prior to curriculum design to better understand existing knowledge, confidence levels and needs among women and men.

In cases where learning will be done virtually, training material design and delivery should aim to be as flexible as possible to accommodate the competing demands that participants have on their time. This can be achieved through—for example—offering flexible deadlines on assignments and choosing suitable communication methods (such as PDF files, rather than Microsoft Word documents, for ease of viewing on a variety of media).

### **The following questions may be helpful to bear in mind when designing training materials to be gender-responsive:**

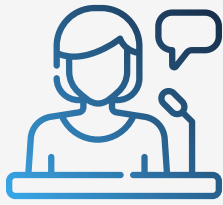
- ▶ *How many women and men are portrayed or mentioned in the text and images?*
- ▶ *When and how often do female characters appear, compared with male characters? Are these portrayals free from stereotypes? What kind of productive, reproductive or community activity is each person involved in?*
- ▶ *How are women and men portrayed in materials (for example, nurturers, economic producers, leaders, or victims)?*
- ▶ *Do the materials use gender-neutral and inclusive language (such as by making reference to people or persons rather than to gendered pronouns such as him or her)?*
- ▶ *Do teaching materials use common (non-technical, non-business jargon) language that is easy to understand for all participants?*

- ▶ *How do the teaching materials promote the idea of equality? Do teaching materials seek to build confidence, resilience, leadership and other key soft skills? Do teaching materials create scenarios for male and female students each to lead, and to experience the classroom as equal peers?*
- ▶ *Are teaching materials available digitally in formats that can be easily accessed on smartphones after the training sessions? Can content be provided in a form that can be downloaded and worked on offline, even where there is low bandwidth?*
- ▶ *Is it possible to develop supplementary materials for learning such as quizzes or tutorials that can be available digitally 'on-demand' to enhance training core content?*

Gender-responsive training materials should not only seek to remove sources of bias against women but also challenge negative stereotypes about men and masculinity. Training can be a window through which men and boys first observe, and then question assumptions about who does what in the home, community and at work; who is responsible; and who benefits. Training can also be an opening to help men strengthen their own personal commitment to gender equality by equipping them with the knowledge and skills to put that commitment into practice in their daily lives.







## 6 | During Training: Key Skills for Gender-responsive Instruction

The trainers will require experience in leading participatory, respectful and open communication classrooms—both face to face and online—and will need to begin with a good understanding of the lives of people in the audience. A balance should be struck between training that addresses the perceived immediate needs of the target participants, and training that helps them to emerge from their comfort zones, developing the skills and confidence to navigate the current business environment successfully. Ideally both female and male trainers should have prior familiarity with basic gender concepts; local NGOs or women's groups may be able to provide useful background information on local norms and dynamics. Starting with roughly equal numbers of male and female trainers can help set the tone for a gender-responsive learning environment for participants.

**In terms of running the classroom, trainers should demonstrate the following skills:**

- ▶ *Valuing equally the learning ability of both female and male participants;*
- ▶ *Actively seeking out the perspectives and lived experiences of male and female participants, to enrich the learning and understanding of everyone in the classroom;*
- ▶ *Facilitating both female and male participants' abilities to learn, progress equally, and develop their potential to the fullest;*
- ▶ *Reacting cautiously to unfriendly and potentially gender-biased attitudes that participants may demonstrate toward peers or may even have internalized about themselves;*
- ▶ *Helping participants question a gender-biased attitude in order to hasten its decline in the future;*
- ▶ *Looking for characteristics or behaviors rooted in social norms that may hinder academic learning and performance (such as shyness, arrogance, dominance, bullying, lack of confidence, or fear of speaking out in class).*
- ▶ *Creating opportunities for group and teamwork to be built into virtual training offerings*

## 7 | During Training: Facilitating Gender-responsive Classroom Interaction



In addition to covering the technical, vocational and professional content of the training at hand, participants can also be encouraged to use their training course as an opportunity to address gender and social inequalities in the community. Participants may be given 'homework' to reflect on with their families, or perhaps to consider alone, along with an invitation to share their ideas and conclusions either online or in-person, if training is classroom-based. Some prompts (questions) may be useful to encourage participants to identify the ways in which gender impacts their own needs, challenges and opportunities, and those of their families and colleagues.

To this end, trainers in the virtual classroom should also maintain regular 'live' opportunities for participants to engage and seek guidance. By tracking the individual progress of each participant and scheduling regular check-ins, trainers will be able to identify early signs of problems and be better positioned to help. Female trainers may be more approachable for female participants; training providers should be sensitive to these dynamics.

Trainers may also consider encouraging participants to form online study and peer support groups to further their learning while building a community—for example, WhatsApp or another platform can be a useful forum for such a group. Local radio may also be a good forum on which to share messages and engage participants, particularly in rural areas with limited internet access.

**In the classroom itself, trainers should consider the following guidelines to encourage full and equal participation from women and men:<sup>7</sup>**

- ▶ *Giving equal chances to both female and male participants to answer questions;*
- ▶ *Extending positive reinforcement to both women and men;*
- ▶ *Allowing time for participants to answer questions—especially female participants who may be shy or afraid to express themselves;*
- ▶ *Assigning exercises that encourage participants—especially women—to speak out;*
- ▶ *Ensuring that working groups are mixed (both women and men); Ensuring that everyone gets to lead discussions;*
- ▶ *Encouraging both men and women to present work or topics in class;*

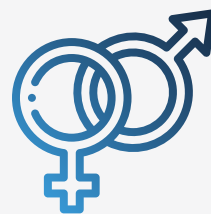
<sup>7</sup> See also pages 28–29 of the IFC GLC Gender Supplement: [https://www.growlearnconnect.org/sites/wkt/files/inline-files/GuideToTraining-Gender%20Programs%20Supp\\_FIN-Linked\\_o.pdf](https://www.growlearnconnect.org/sites/wkt/files/inline-files/GuideToTraining-Gender%20Programs%20Supp_FIN-Linked_o.pdf)

- ▶ *Using male and female characters when providing case study examples—which should also be developed to reflect the specifics of the local culture and highlight issues and challenges relevant to women and men within this environment;*
- ▶ *Create an environment conducive to learning;*
- ▶ *Keep participants 'on task' and help them to take responsibility for their own learning;*
- ▶ *Tailor learning experiences to the specific needs of individuals and groups;*
- ▶ *Optimize opportunities for participants to interact and practice; and*
- ▶ *Explore the use of gamification techniques (for example, point scoring, mini-competitions, rewards, peer comparison with other participants) to incentivize participants themselves to amplify gender inclusivity in the classroom. This could be achieved, for example, by rewarding participants who demonstrate inclusive behaviors and collaboration.*
- ▶ *Given the importance of positive role models—ensuring that both male and female businesspeople can be brought into the classroom or virtual learning environment as guest speakers, and / or be available for a period for participants to interact with and ask questions of.*

There may be situations that arise in the classroom or in an online chatroom or forum, where participants are disrespectful to one another, or to the trainer. Gender dynamics may play a role in conflict or hostility. It is important that the trainer remains calm in the face of provocation—attempting to de-escalate negative emotions while reminding participants of their commitment to each other and their own learning, and reinforcing the principle that any bias or prejudice towards others cannot be accommodated in these spaces. Techniques that can be useful in de-escalating disrespectful behavior include reflective listening—listening carefully to the aggrieved parties, asking questions, and attempting to summarize their concerns and perspectives, to relay these back in a respectful manner, and speaking slowly and calmly, which often has a contagiously calming effect on others. If participants continue to disrespect others, discriminate or belittle on the basis of gender, they may need to be spoken to in private/offline, and given an official warning that, unless their behavior changes, they will be asked to leave the training session.

## 8 | A Note on Gender-based Violence and Sexual Harassment

Trainers have a duty of care towards all participants—from this perspective, it is advisable for trainers to undergo anti-sexual harassment training so they can help to provide a safe learning environment and be sensitized to understanding and recognizing appropriate conduct and behavior. Creating a relationship of trust in the classroom with participants may lead to trainers being approached by participants to seek help or guidance with challenges they are experiencing in their wider lives—including, potentially, family, sexual or gender-based violence. It may also lead to trainers observing worrying signs or behavior suggesting that participants might be subject to gender-based violence or sexual harassment outside of the classroom. It is worth adding that a virtual training format does not necessarily prevent the possibility bullying or harassment taking place; trainers should be sensitive and alert to these dynamics. It would perfectly understandable if a trainer without specialized expertise felt overwhelmed when encountering that sort of painful situation. For this reason, it is useful to form a partnership with relevant local professionals prior to starting training—for example, experienced staff at a reputable NGO, or designated government ministry. Through this partnership, trainers could themselves be trained on how to respond properly to such cases and refer them to the appropriate channels of support. It is also helpful for trainers. It might prove useful, or even necessary, to design and deliver an additional module within the training for participants, on such topics such as the ‘denormalization’ of violence, and how to employ self-restraint tools (i.e. techniques and strategies to safely avoid situations of escalation). Finally, it is important for training providers to familiarize themselves with the relevant laws around sexual harassment in their jurisdiction, as well as any mandated duty of care they may have as education providers, to ensure that they comply with legal reporting responsibilities.





## 9 | Gender and Supporting the Transfer and Evaluation of Learning

The ‘transfer’ of learning denotes the ability of participants to apply the materials and skills acquired during training to their work and business environments. To maximize the likelihood of participants retaining a sense of relevance from the training, follow-up actions like coaching, networking, or participation in peer group discussion forums with other alumni can help reinforce lessons and enable continued community building and resource sharing. Follow-up actions preferred by male and female training participants may vary. As suggested in IFC’s Guide to Training, networks, peer support, mentoring and coaching are particularly valuable in supporting women to apply their learning to their work and everyday lives.

Evaluating learning denotes assessing the effectiveness of training interventions. Evaluation focuses on whether training helped to change business outcomes for male and female participants. Evaluation may include feedback surveys, knowledge tests, self-perception questionnaires for participants (particularly focusing on such topics as confidence) and developing metrics to track and compare business performance before and after training. From a gender perspective, it is key to ensure that all data collected is gender disaggregated, includes both men and women in the data collection sample, and includes questions aimed at capturing any gender differences in participation and engagement. For example: how suitable was the training venue in terms of meeting women’s and men’s needs? If training was virtual—how well did this method work for participants? How satisfied were women and men in terms of the classroom (whether physical or virtual) facilitation and their sense of inclusion? How significantly would they deem the training to have augmented their self-assessed confidence as entrepreneurs and business owners? In terms of the design of the evaluation, attention should be given in particular to any differences between men and women in literacy, online access, technical skills, and the time or resources to dedicate to evaluation activities (vis-à-vis other responsibilities at home or at work).



## 10 | Further Resources

Elliott & Orser, 2020 “Gender-Smart Entrepreneurship Education & Training Plus (GEET+).” Available online at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344237394\\_Gender-Smart\\_Entrepreneurship\\_Education\\_Training\\_Plus\\_GEET](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344237394_Gender-Smart_Entrepreneurship_Education_Training_Plus_GEET)

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