



30 August 2022

Addressing Gender (in)Equity in the Artisanal Industry | Insights from the IRM Initiative

Gender inequity presents significant barriers to the socio-economic upliftment of women and gender-diverse persons in the artisanal industry. Research has sought to highlight the cumulative impact of exclusion, which includes the confluence of patriarchal norms, gender roles, the gendered pay gap, workplace exclusion, discrimination, and bias, and its attendant consequences on women. However, this has not translated into any discernible policy or practical interventions. This failure to address the multitude of exclusionary practices and experiences in women's lived reality speaks to the untransformed nature of the artisanal space - a largely white, male-dominated and (often) exploitative industry that continues to exclude Black women living under conditions of poverty.

Systemic exclusion refers to the structural barriers that prevent marginalised people from fully and freely participating in a segment of society and the economy. In this instance, the exclusion faced by women and gender diverse persons can be attributed to prevailing stereotypes concerning (amongst others) the appropriate roles that they ought to assume in the workplace, which tend to play into antiquated tropes of women as secretaries, administrative assistants, and other supporting roles. For example, in the artisanal industry women entrepreneurs

face grave barriers in accessing finance, contracting opportunities, technology, and other opportunities for upskilling. In turn, these obstacles have a negative impact on their capacity to grow and expand their businesses, especially in an economic climate where SMMEs are seen as a crucial but chronically under-supported catalyst for job creation amongst marginalised groups.^[1]

Moreover, issues of discrimination and bias where jobs are assumed to be masculine tend to hinder the employment prospects of young women and gender diverse persons. This is often seen in the exclusion of young women trainees from operating various machinery or leading in the routine installation or maintenance of sanitary fixtures. Further, the 'gender penalty', which encapsulates issues of pay inequity, sexual harassment, untransformed parental leave policies and non-existent/limited caregiver benefits, all have a disproportionate impact on women and gender diverse persons. These intersecting and entrenched dimensions of exclusion make for an artisanal environment that is not suitable for the integration and growth of this group in an equitable manner.

It is in considering this context that the **National Business Initiative (NBI)** has sought to embed the Gender Equity & Social Inclusion (GESI) framework in its programmatic interventions, as part and parcel of the Installation, Repairs & Maintenance (IRM) Initiative. The GESI framework seeks to address the systemic and societal barriers that prevent women and other marginalised groups from accessing skills development initiatives and other income-generating opportunities in the artisanal space. This framework takes a multi-pronged approach that puts gender considerations at the core of all IRM interventions, including ensuring that the overarching ecosystem is safe and inclusive in all its constituent parts. Some of the key interventions in this approach include the delivery of GESI workshops to host employers, college facilitators and IRM trainees respectively; assisting host employers to develop and implement gender-inclusive policies in the workplace; and the introduction of a Gender Liaison Officer to oversee this area of work.

While the scaling up of this intervention is imminent, its earlier iteration within some of NBI's projects has yielded positive results. For example, a recent post-training evaluation showed a higher rate of employment for women trainees in relation to their male counterparts. These early indicators are in line with studies that show a correlation between the elimination of barriers against women in certain occupations and an increase in labour productivity and transformation in the workplace^[2].

We believe that a holistic understanding of the key drivers of social and economic exclusion is but one part of solving this equation. The other is through a concerted effort in galvanising industry action to tackle the various dimensions of gender inequity. As we grow this important area of our work, we welcome opportunities for collaboration with companies that are looking to support our efforts.

Companies interested in learning more about our economic inclusion pathway are encouraged to contact Xhanti Mhlambiso (XhantiM@nbi.org.za)

^[1] World Bank Development Report "Gender Equality and Development" (2020) Washington.

^[1] World Bank Development Report "Gender Equality and Development" (2020) Washington.

^[2] UNESCO "Unleashing the Potential: Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training" (2018) Paris.

^[2] UNESCO “Unleashing the Potential: Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training” (2018) Paris.



Copyright © 2022 NBI, All rights reserved.

The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.

NBI Website: www.nbi.org.za

Email: info@nbi.org.za

The National Business Initiative (NBI) respects your right to privacy, if you do not wish to receive any further news updates from the NBI, please click [UNSUBSCRIBE](#) and your name will be removed from the mailing list.