



1st Roundtable on the Gender Equality and Empowerment Benchmark

Mumbai – 7 March 2019
Summary report

Overview



The World Benchmarking Alliance, in collaboration with the Consulate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Mumbai, held its first ever roundtable for the Gender Equality and Empowerment Benchmark (GEEB) on 7th March 2019 in Mumbai, India. This roundtable was organized in the spirit of keeping a multi-stakeholder dialogue central to the GEEB's development process, welcoming a mix of 30+ private sector, multi-lateral, civil society, and academic organisations. It was an opportunity to share the progress on the development of the GEEB, generate inclusive dialogue to strengthen its methodology, and align on key decisions.

The roundtable began with an initial overview and introduction to the GEEB that outlined why the WBA is developing a gender benchmark, what the benchmark hopes to capture and its current status. Broadly speaking, the group reaffirmed the need for a company-level gender equality and empowerment benchmark. More specifically, the discussion reinforced what the **initial scoping report** lays out: that this effort will require an approach that is integrated, holistic and balanced. Two key points of consideration raised by participants included, first, the need to explicitly differentiate between gender *equality* and *empowerment*, particularly as it relates to measuring each in the context of corporate performance. Secondly, participants stressed the importance of the

benchmark moving beyond measuring high-level policy commitments to tracking more performance-based metrics that better assess impact and build a stronger evidence base.

The discussion was then centered on two key questions that were addressed through group discussions and breakout sessions:

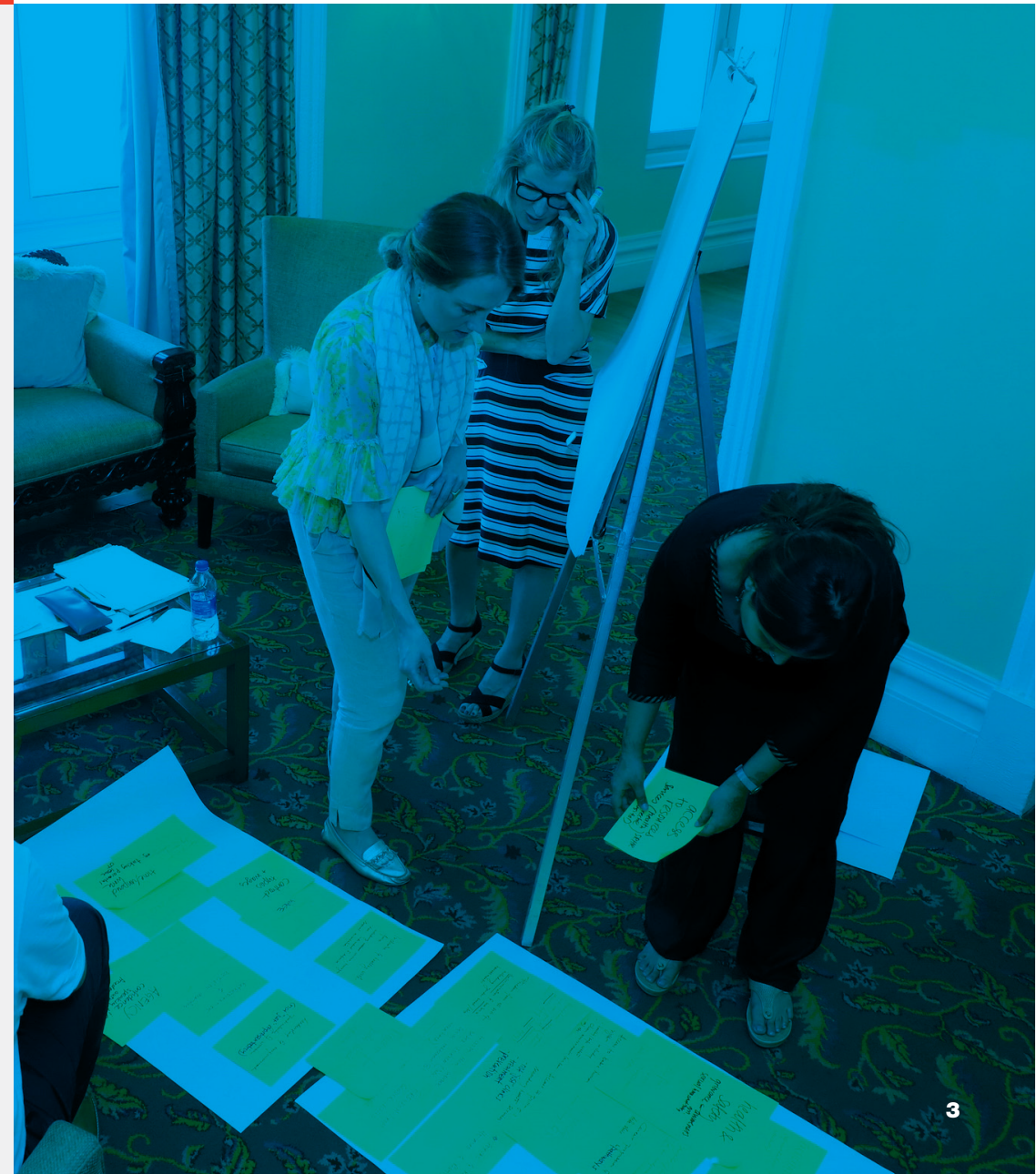
- **Which industries should the GEEB prioritise?**
- **Which thematic areas are 'must-haves' for the GEEB?**

Emerging from these discussions, and building on parallel discussions with other experts in the field, there were two key takeaways that will inform the continued development of the GEEB:

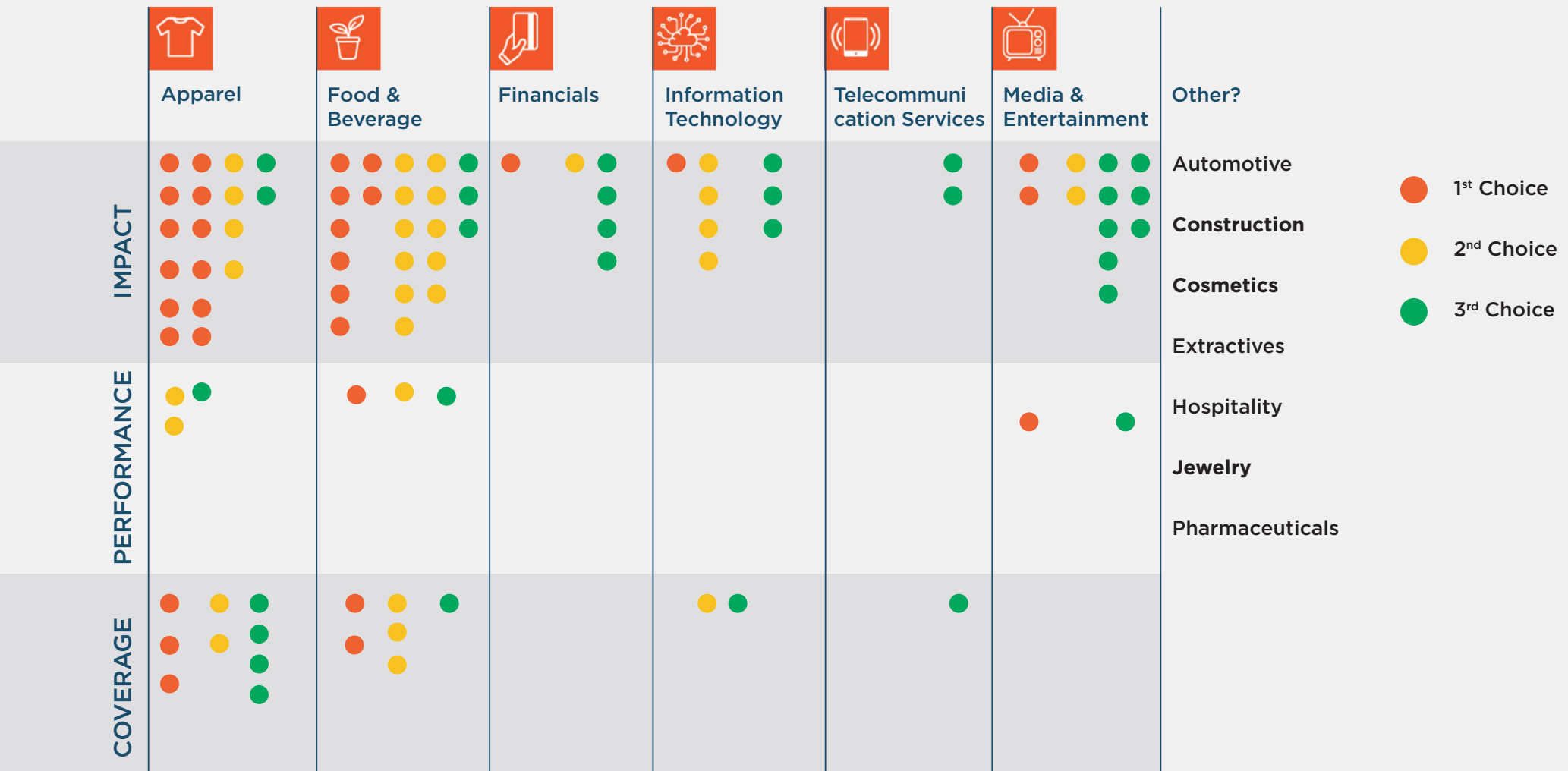
1. **We will focus on the Apparel industry first.**
2. **We have a "shorter" list of must-have themes that will need to be refined further.**

Industry prioritisation for the GEEB

To set the context for this discussion, an overview of the GEEB's thinking around industry prioritisation (based on both desk research and expert interviews) was shared among the group. Here, we discussed the importance of taking an industry-specific approach as well as the selection criteria utilised in identifying the six priority industries that had been selected to date. These criteria included: 1, the industry's potential **impact** on gender equality and empowerment (e.g., potential female employees/consumers affected); 2, the industry's current **performance** on gender equality and empowerment; and 3, the industry's representative **coverage** of the value chain and key gender themes (e.g., existing gender work/momentum to leverage). Of the six priority industries identified, roundtable participants were asked to rank what they believed to be the top three industries the GEEB should initially focus on and why. The results of this exercise are represented on the next page.



Industry prioritisation for the GEEB



Industry prioritisation for the GEEB

As can be seen from the diagram above, the apparel and food & beverage industries were overwhelmingly chosen among participants as a priority for the GEEB, with impact being the primary reason given. For both industries, the number of women within their supply chains was a particularly compelling reason for this focus.

Apparel

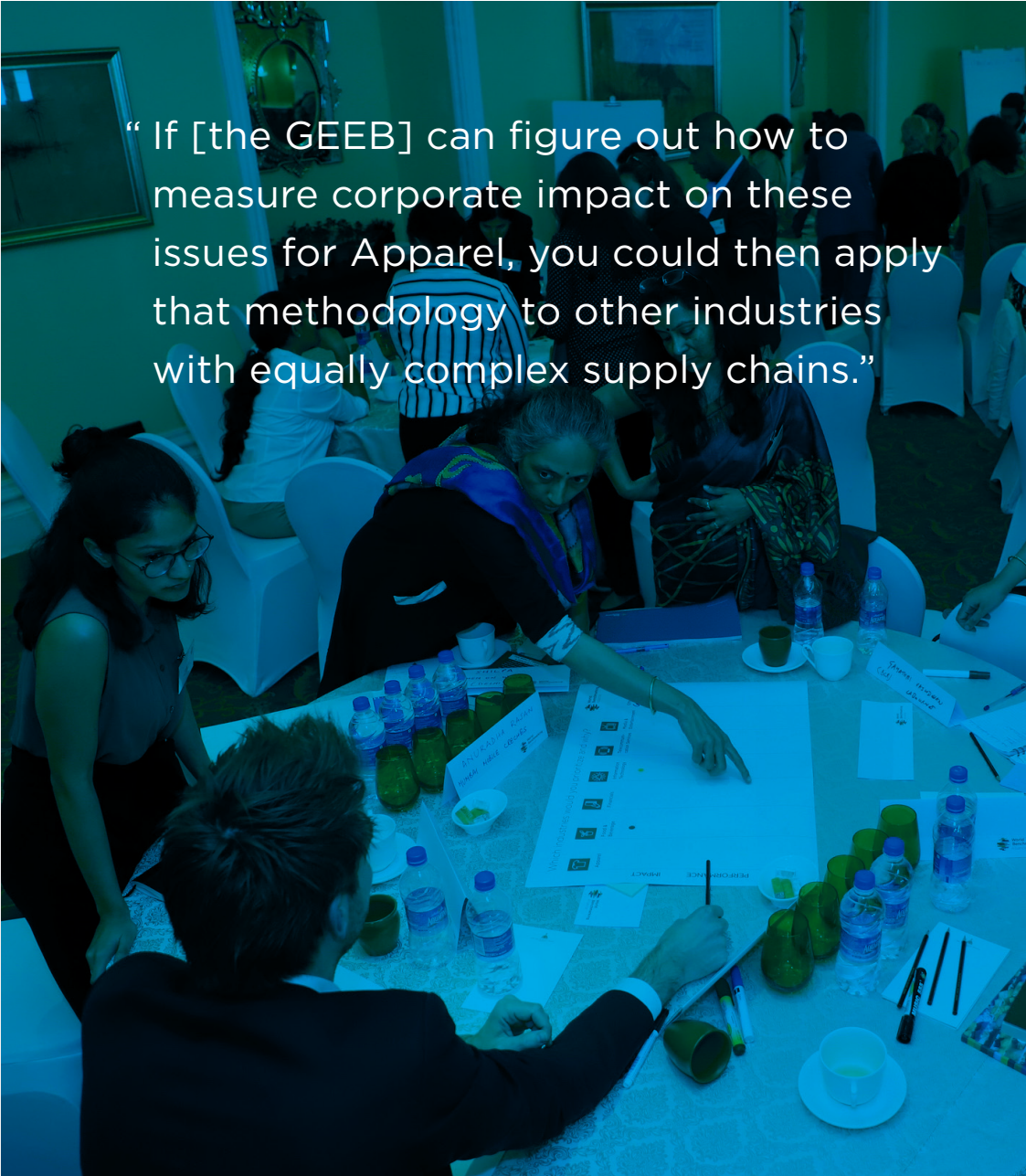
Extensive and rich discussions were had around the apparel supply chain in particular, reinforcing the unique position of India in particular (and South Asia more broadly) in this context. The high number of female workers in the apparel supply chain was one of the key reasons participants gave for identifying it as a priority GEEB industry. Participants highlighted that given the dominant female workforce, the impact the GEEB could have with regards to the number of women reached would be far greater than the other industries mentioned. For example, as one participant noted, a large number of female employees in the apparel value chain overall has not led to a proportionate amount of female workers in managerial and/or senior positions. One participant argued “if you have so many women at the production level, you should have as many women [proportionately] at the leadership level.” Participants believed that the GEEB could serve as a mechanism to drive this change forward.

Many participants also felt that given the industry’s long and complex supply chain, it faces a number of challenges that also exist in other industries, such as informal and insecure employment, child labour, and low pay, among others. “If [the GEEB] can figure out how to measure corporate impact on these issues for Apparel, you could then apply that methodology to other industries with equally complex supply chains,” commented one participant.

Another benefit participants brought to light was that as well as having a high number of women in the apparel supply chain, there are also a high number of women within the apparel industry’s consumer base. This means, for example, that the GEEB can capture supply chain themes while also addressing marketplace issues around how companies choose to market and/or advertise their products, impacting broader concerns around social norms.

Many participants highlighted that the apparel industry is already an area of focus for many sustainability and gender reporting initiatives, and there was some debate as to whether or not this would be a hindrance or a help to the GEEB. Some participants felt that this meant the conversation was already happening and this gave the GEEB a strong foundation to build

Industry prioritisation for the GEEB



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upon, both in terms of data availability and corporate engagement. Others argued that companies within the industry could likely feel fatigued from all the reporting requirements and may not welcome any additional burdens. They argued it may be better to focus on an industry that had similar issues but had received less scrutiny. In both cases, there was consensus that currently, regardless of the current reporting initiatives in place, there are not effective ways of separating corporate policy disclosures from actual impact and performance, and it was strongly felt that this was a role the GEEB should fill.

Food & Beverage

The food & beverage industry was the second most popular industry chosen for the GEEB to consider. Similar reasons were given with regards to the high number of women in the supply chain facing a number of labour issues such as low pay, informal employment, child labour, and unsafe working conditions. Several participants raised the point that there may be some overlap between a GEEB focused on the food & beverage industry with other WBA benchmarks that will exist within the Food System Transformation and inquired as to what opportunities there were for alignment and consolidation.

Industry prioritisation for the GEEB

Other industries

Aside from the top two industries discussed, many participants felt that the media & entertainment industry could also be a strong contender for a focus industry given the impact it has on shaping societal norms and perceptions. As one participant stated, “media is very consumer facing, and how they portray women can have a big impact.”

Both the financials and information technology industries were viewed as important industries due to their role in addressing financial inclusion and closing the digital divide, respectively, both seen as key issues for achieving gender equality and empowerment. A few participants pointed out that within the IT industry it was important to understand at what part of the supply chain the GEEB would have a focus. While it was felt that gender issues within the software industry related to a largely male workforce and lack of appropriate female representation, and discrimination, the production of IT hardware and the extractives industry that links to this may have supply chain issues more similar to the apparel and food & beverage industries. However, it still was not felt that this was strong enough to position IT as a priority industry. One participant argued “if you are able to benchmark complex supply chains like food & beverage or apparel, then you can better translate this

to IT, for example by looking at the production of hardware and extractive industries.” Many participants also felt that alignment should exist between the GEEB’s benchmarking of the IT industry and the WBA’s proposed Digital Inclusion Benchmark.

As can be seen in the figure above, a number of other industries were suggested and these were largely highlighted for similar reasons, for example, including number of women in the value chain (hospitality), number of women in the consumer base (cosmetics, jewelry), and/or key to achieving the overall aim of gender equality and empowerment (healthcare, pharmaceuticals).



Must-have thematic areas for the GEEB

Following the discussion on industry prioritisation, the 2nd key question regarding “must-have” thematic areas for the GEEB was addressed. Similarly, to set the context for this discussion, participants were provided with a list of gender themes collected to date that desk research and expert interviews revealed should at least be considered when developing the GEEB with a truly “holistic” approach in mind. Among these, priority themes had been selected based on three key criteria: 1, their potential **impact** on gender equality and empowerment overall; 2, their **relevance**, to SDG 5 in particular; and 3, the potential **influence** companies could have in driving change in this area. In smaller breakout groups, participants were given the opportunity to identify and share the gender themes they found most important and why, with key themes across participants in a given group being synthesized along the way. Across all breakout groups, about a dozen ‘must-have’ themes were identified, as follows.

Agency/Empowerment

Nearly all participants agreed that the concept of agency and/or empowerment should be one of the key themes for the GEEB to include, while also considering it one of the hardest themes to operationalise for measurement. There was much discussion around this theme that mainly centred around how to define it,

how to measure it and how to achieve it. A number of participants believed that agency and empowerment was related to decision making powers women had, both in and outside of the workplace. While others defined it more specifically around leadership opportunities, or less tangible measures like confidence



Must-have thematic areas for the GEEB

or how comfortable women feel challenging authority. Participants noted that the GEEB will need to consider if agency and empowerment is a theme that should be measured in itself, or is better proxied through the measurement of other themes related to, for example, participation and representation as evidence of agency and empowerment. Captured in participants' discussion of what agency and empowerment as a theme could mean or how it could be measured, was also a consideration of why it is important. Many participants felt that achieving agency and empowerment within a work setting could have positive effects on women's personal and social lives as well, leading to higher self-esteem and further contributing to the overall aim of gender equality and empowerment.

Representation

There was general, and strong, consensus around the need to ensure women are fairly represented in the workforce broadly, but also at all levels of an organisation. This included ensuring companies are held to account for:

- **Participation:** This included supporting women's formal participation in the labour force, particularly those in the informal sector that are typically 'invisible' to the system

including, for example, home-based workers in the garment sector in South Asia.

- **Occupational segregation:** This included ensuring companies are offering women access to roles in functions that are not traditionally female roles (e.g., engineering).
- **Leadership:** This included ensuring that women in leadership are being tracked not just at the Board level, but also throughout all levels of management, across all aspects of the organisation.

Compensation

Fair remuneration and *gender wage gap* were widely agreed as being important themes that the GEEB should track, certainly building on the growing global momentum around the topic. However, rich discussion was also had around compensation more broadly, including:

- **Contracts:** A rather prevalent issue in India and South Asia, participants highlighted how easy it was for contingent, temporary, migrant and/or informal workers to 'slip through the net' and be subject to a number of labour and workplace abuses, particular regarding low pay and working conditions. As such, the types and quality of contracts extended to

Must-have thematic areas for the GEEB



female workers was identified as an important theme. This led into a discussion about “equal pay for equal value” with participants saying companies need to go beyond the ‘equal pay for equal work’ motto, and think critically about which roles are valued over another and why, as well as whether or not these are largely female dominated roles and if there are roles women are actively encouraged or discouraged to go into.

- **Wages + Benefits:** Furthermore, beyond ensuring that contracts and compensation upheld basic labour rights, the GEEB should consider compensation more broadly, not ‘just’ capturing wages, but also capturing broader benefits like pensions, professional development opportunities, or childcare support, among others.

Must-have thematic areas for the GEEB

Education, Training & Mentoring

Another theme that participants discussed was the availability of education, training and mentoring. While some participants viewed this theme as more of a ‘nice to have’ rather than a must-have theme within the GEEB, others argued that these serve as essential inputs into achieving the larger aims of agency, empowerment and leadership. “This is one of the easiest ways to develop women within the organisation structure,” one participant claimed, with many agreeing and noting that workplace development can have a wider effect on their lives outside of work, while also opening up opportunities for promotion in the workplace. One participant stated that an additional benefit of mentoring in particular is that it creates a mechanism for bottom up feedback if senior people are mentoring junior employees. The consistent availability of such initiatives was flagged as critical, with some participants noting that corporations should ensure it is a focus in both good and bad economic times, not only when they have an abundance of resources to offer.

Access to resources

A number of participants spoke about the importance of access to resources such as *water, sanitation and hygiene, land rights, financial resources, digital resources, energy* and other essential basic services. It will be important for the GEEB to consider which

of these companies could, and should, have a role in influencing these areas. It was recognized that the extent to which companies can influence change in any one of these areas will vary by industry with, for example, companies in the financials industry having more direct influence over access to financial resources.

Workplace conditions

The health and safety underlying workplace conditions were seen as being a critical barrier to employment. Participants argued that women have to consider a number of factors when deciding to take on or stay in a role including transportation to and from work, what sanitation facilities are available such as toilets, or whether there are gender segregated changing rooms. Many participants agreed that the existence or non-existence of these can often be the main reason women do not seek certain roles. Participants felt positive about the GEEB’s ability to track impact on these areas as they are measurable issues.

Freedom from gender-based violence

Participants emphasised the importance of considering gender-based violence as a spectrum of actions rather than a clear cut issue. One participant commented, ‘it can start with comments, looks and exclusion before reaching the point of physical violence,’ and

Must-have thematic areas for the GEEB


participants believed it was a theme that had significant influence on other issues such as participation.

Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR)

Within the discussion on health and safety, some participants emphasised the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights, commenting that companies need to do more to provide access to both preventative and treatment services. Some participants argued that SRHR as a theme is generally underrepresented in existing resources in the field that consider companies' role in this context, yet the importance of addressing it cannot be underestimated. In particular, some argued that education, information and access to reproductive health (including family planning, contraception, etc.) is critical in achieving women's empowerment.

Social norms

Similarly to agency and empowerment, changing social and cultural gender norms was seen as both critical and difficult to measure. A number of participants felt that companies needed to take an active role in changing the mindset of men and boys, both within the workplace and wider community. One participant argued that “companies separate between the work space and the family space,



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Must-have thematic areas for the GEEB

but they both impact one another. They cannot keep seeing them in silos.” Another participant built upon this point by highlighting the ‘trust deficit’ that exists between managers and their employees. “Male managers will not trust female employees to work from home. They think about all of the home responsibilities their wives have and believe this is what their employees will be doing rather than working.” The effects of this can limit women’s ability to take up benefits that may be on offer to them such as flexible working

or working from home. Alternatively women can also be prevented from working overtime, or working past a certain time, if managers feel they should be at home fulfilling these responsibilities. In either case, participants stressed the need to challenge these norms and allow women to have more autonomy over their work and home lives by addressing both explicit and unconscious biases. A number of participants agreed with this sentiment, with one stating, “if you create values in the workplace, that will translate to the home.” Participants suggested this is best achieved through senior leadership embedding these values from the top down. Although hard to measure, participants felt that if leadership shapes company culture, implements policies and makes them meaningful, people will ‘live the values of their companies.’

Unpaid care

There was implicit agreement among all participants that echoes the data available today: women carry a disproportionate amount of the unpaid care burden (whether in the care of their children, other dependents, or, increasingly, with elders). There was also consensus that companies stand to play a role in helping drive change here. The provision of childcare, either available onsite or subsidised, was stressed by participants as being a key factor on female workers’ decision to take or refuse particular jobs. One



Must-have thematic areas for the GEEB

participant commented, “Good quality childcare is critical for women to stay in the workforce. It’s not just about safety but also security, nourishment and mental stimulation, so you don’t feel guilty about leaving your child.” While some participants felt that provision of onsite childcare would be most effective in ensuring both quality and convenience, particularly for women working in factories, others argued that many companies do not have the facilities to do this and that the main aim should be for women to receive a wage high enough to ensure they can afford the child care of their own choosing.

Legal protection

A number of participants believed that legal structures and protections provide an important building block for addressing key themes such as women’s agency and discrimination. It is crucial that companies place their focus not just on creating policies and regulations but on actually implementing them. For example, many participants stressed that although there can be multiple laws in place to address gender-based violence, often they are not effectively implemented, particularly as they apply to informal or other vulnerable workers. Consequently, many participants believed that effective grievance mechanisms needed to be in place to quickly and effectively address any concerns. In

addition to this, participants highlighted the need to ensure protections for key benefits such as parental leave, flexible working hours and other arrangements that women may rely on. For each of the legal protections participants discussed, they stressed the importance of companies going beyond just providing access to employees and ensuring they are widely publicised, understood and utilised. They also stressed the importance of especially supporting those in the informal sector in this vain, as they are often unaware of, or don’t have access to, legal protections through formal contracts, trade unions, etc.



Next steps

We are feeling more informed, more energized and more inspired by the rich discussions held in Mumbai, which will provide valuable guidance in the development process of the GEEB. Very concretely, regarding the two key takeaways we've drawn, this means:

1. **We will focus on the Apparel industry first.** This is based on the clear consensus in Mumbai, but also in extensive research and discussions held to date with experts around the world. This means we will step up our corporate engagement immediately, with a particular focus on the apparel sector. We welcome any and all references to leading experts, organisations and/or research in the field, specifically as relates to driving gender equality and empowerment among apparel companies. In parallel, we will also keep an eye out for those themes and indicators that, while explored in the context of the apparel industry, may also be sector-neutral and relevant more broadly.
2. **We have a “shorter” list of must-have themes that will need to be refined further.** Based on extensive research and interviews, and further reinforced in Mumbai, we've landed on about a dozen must-have themes, but these still need to be translated to the Apparel industry as

a starting point, across the full value chain, and across commitment-, transparency- and performance-focused indicators. As such, we will need to refine our list further, focusing on those issues that are most salient and where companies have most influence, and remembering that we need to manage the tension between data depth and the reporting burden to companies.

In the coming weeks and months, we will continue our research, consultation with experts, and outreach at relevant gender convenings around the world. This will inform the creation of the draft GEEB methodology report.

We continue to welcome any feedback on the GEEB. Should you have any thoughts to share, please contact Danielle Burt at d.burt@worldbenchmarkingalliance.org.

List of participants



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Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Business for Social Responsibility

C&A Foundation

Corporate Human Rights Benchmark

Equileap

Ernst & Young

Family Planning Association of India

Good Business Lab

Idobro

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ISEAL Alliance

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ShareAction

Snehalaya UK

Swasti Health Catalyst

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