



**World  
Benchmarking  
Alliance**

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Roundtable on the Gender Equality and Empowerment Benchmark

Vancouver – 2 June 2019  
Summary report



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The World Benchmarking Alliance (WBA) held its second roundtable for the Gender Equality and Empowerment Benchmark (GEEB) on 2nd June 2019 in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The roundtable brought together 24 participants from across non-governmental organisations (NGOs), multi-/bi-lateral organisations, companies, financial and research institutions to discuss the latest progress on the development of the GEEB and to help evolve it.

The meeting began with a general introduction to the WBA and the GEEB, intended to familiarise those new to these efforts as well as provide a forum for questions to be raised and addressed. Thereafter, an interactive set of discussions and breakout sessions was held that focused on evolving the GEEB methodology. Here, participants considered questions including:

- What are the key gender equality & empowerment themes you experience in your day-to-day that you feel companies can help drive change on?
- How are these key themes reflected in the current (work-in-progress) version of the GEEB? Or, how can the GEEB evolve to better capture them?
- Which among these key themes are the most important and why?

These questions were considered broadly and at a high level across all GEEB themes identified to date, and then further and in more detail for a subset of GEEB themes. The key takeaways coming out of these discussions included:

- **There is general support for the current structure and coverage of the GEEB, and particularly strong support for select themes** (e.g., Representation & Compensation) **and sub-themes** (e.g., access to reproductive health, women's participation at all levels of leadership, childcare support, equal pay, contract types, GBV prevention).
- **Moving beyond commitment-level data is critical, though the collection of reliable gender-disaggregated data will be hard.**
- **We're ready to move from the *what* (sub/themes) to the *how* (indicators).**

## Introduction to the WBA & the GEEB



“The exciting feature about this benchmark is making all the information accessible for everyone.”

“I am excited about the focus on the apparel industry as the broader tools do not focus on some of the important issues and this initiative is a nice complement to what is already available.”

To set the context for the roundtable, an introduction to both the WBA and the GEEB was provided to the group, with room for discussion to follow. In general, the group reaffirmed the value the GEEB brings to a broad set of stakeholders. Among others, they saw value in taking a multi-stakeholder approach that builds on, and helps drive consensus in, the crowded gender landscape. They were also encouraged by an open source approach that brings transparency and accountability to the role of companies in driving gender equality and empowerment.

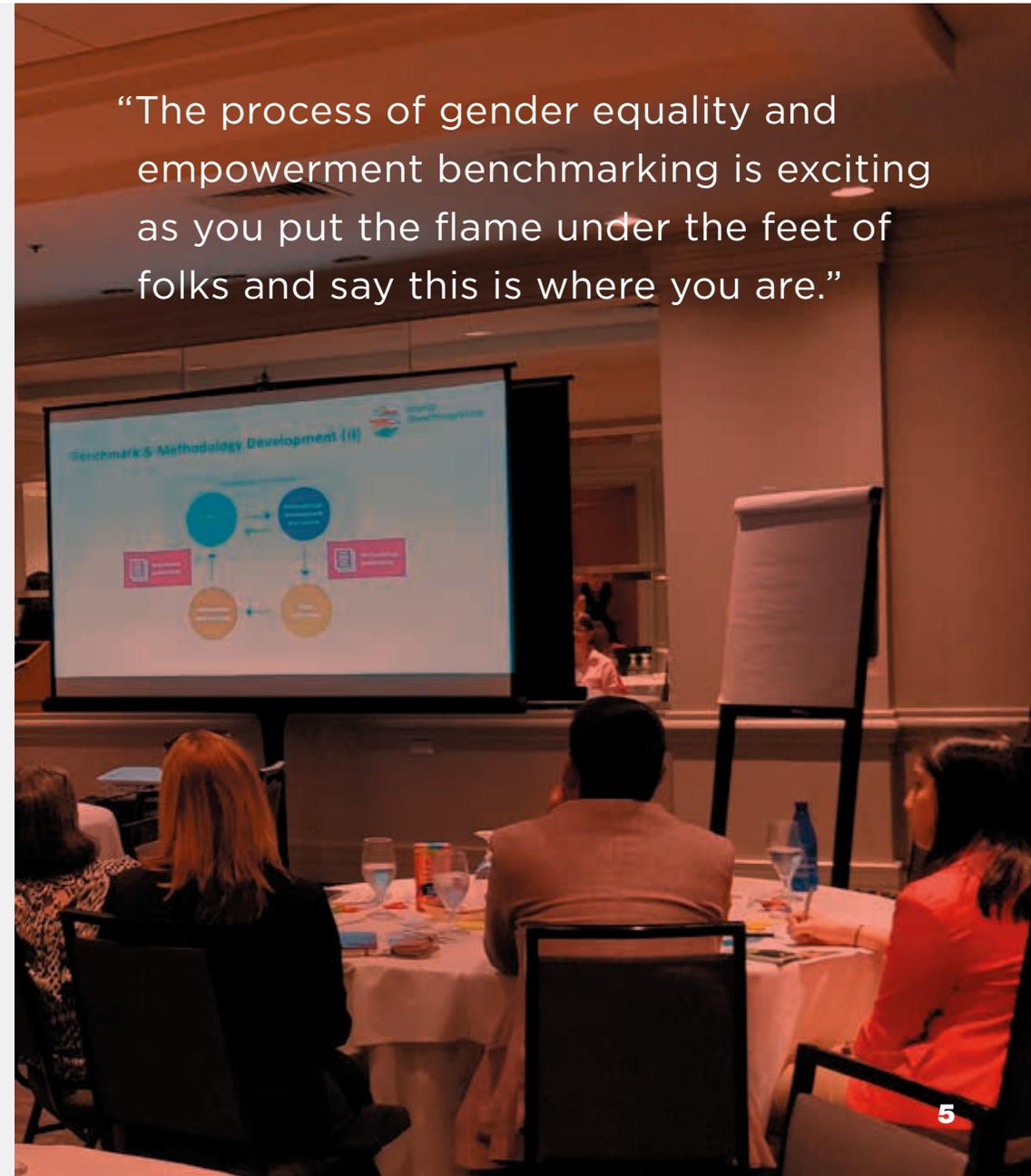
Participants were generally supportive of the decision to focus on the Apparel industry first. Here, the GEEB will assess the top ~30 ‘keystone actors’ in the global Apparel industry, which may include those with the largest revenue and/or market cap, largest number of employees, portfolio companies and/or specific subsidiary brands, publicly traded, privately held or state-owned ownership structures and companies with up-/down-stream influence. While there was interest expressed in country-level data, the GEEB currently proposes to assess Apparel companies on a global scale to begin with and consider future (regional or other) versions depending on what the data show.

## Introduction to the WBA & the GEEB

Some concerns were raised specifically with regard to the current lack of reliable gender-disaggregated data, particularly as relates to the supply chain. There was general agreement that organisations currently lack reliable systems/processes that collect gender disaggregated data. That said, the group felt the GEEB is well-positioned to reinforce the need for companies to collect more and better gender-disaggregated data over time. It can, as well, consider scoring companies on how transparent they are in terms of providing data and making it publicly available, and/or on the extent to which they are putting the right systems in place to collect these data.

“We need to start somewhere. It is going to be a challenge, but companies with good business practices will lead the way as examples for others.”

“The process of gender equality and empowerment benchmarking is exciting as you put the flame under the feet of folks and say this is where you are.”



# Review of current GEEB themes



Following this introduction session, a review of the current, work-in-progress version of the GEEB's structure and key themes was discussed. Here, participants were asked to think about the gender

equality & empowerment themes they experience in their day-to-day and that companies stand to drive change on, and consider the extent to which the following GEEB structure captured them:

## Current GEEB structure

Commitment	Legal protection	Representation	Compensation	Health/Well-being	Freedom from GBV
Commitment to GE/E	Commitment to gender-sensitive legal protection	Commitment to non-discrimination	Commitment to equitable compensation	Commitment to women's H&WB	Commitment to Freedom from GBV
Accountability	Transparency re: legal protection (grievances/remediation)	Transparency re: participation data	Transparency re: remuneration data	Transparency re: H&WB data	Transparency re: GBV data
Stakeholder engagement	Processes/systems of gender-sensitive legal protection	Participation	Equitable remuneration	Physical (workplace) conditions	GBV prevention
Transparency	Education & communication of legal rights	Supplier diversity	Benefits	H&WB information & services	GBV response
		Marketplace diversity	Education, Training & Mentoring	Mental H&WB	

## Review of current GEEB themes

Generally speaking, there was agreement among participants that the proposed structure of the GEEB is directionally correct, both in its representative capture of key themes as well as in its depth within each theme. Furthermore, the following more detailed insights were collected:

- **Some themes appear more common than others.** The themes that were referred to the most by the group (and significantly more than other themes noted) were *Representation* (specifically re: *participation*) and *Compensation* (specifically re: *equitable remuneration and benefits*), which helps inform their inclusion and position in the GEEB. Interestingly, *Legal Protection* was referred to the least, which could be a reflection of the focus of the expertise of the roundtable participants. Here, *education & communication of legal rights* was the most popular sub-theme among participants, who agreed that legal literacy of women employees in the company and across the supply chain is important. Additionally, one participant added that gender discrimination audits can help gender-sensitise human rights due diligence and risk assessment processes in this context.
- **Commitment isn't enough.** *Commitment* ranked among the themes that were least referred to, which complements the desire and need to move beyond policy-/commitment-oriented indicators alone. In this spirit, there was general (and strong) consensus among participants that a mere commitment towards gender equality is not enough; rather, how companies perform against this commitment is important. Further, there was conversation around the need to consider companies' activities both in terms of addressing existing issues as well as preventing future issues. That said, some participants also noted the importance of capturing commitment from the lens of *budget allocation* and *partnerships* with organisations advocating for gender equality.
- **Access to capital is important.** Participants discussed whether the GEEB should have a stronger focus on financial inclusion. This comes to life both in the form of ensuring

“GEEB is not just a tick box exercise for companies, but it builds the business case to stakeholders as to why gender equality is a good business decision.”

## Review of current GEEB themes

financial inclusion at the community level – e.g., ensuring women employees have access to a bank account, control over their finances, financial literacy education, etc. It is also important in the context of support for local female entrepreneurs, including their access to investment/lending options.

- **There are a few additional themes worth exploring.** While it did not appear that the following themes were considered more important than those included in the current version of the GEEB, some participants felt they were worth exploring.

In particular, a couple of participants mentioned the need to consider *product safety* and *environmental friendliness*. Some participants mentioned the importance of screening for whether a *company's capital investments* are working for or against their stated values, or whether there's transparency into a company's political donations. Finally, there was broad consensus around the importance of understanding companies' *business practices* as they relate to gender equality and empowerment. Namely, business practices connected to the buyer/supplier relationship can have a significant social impact further into the supply chain.



## Deep-dive into select GEEB themes



Following the broader discussion around all of the themes currently addressed in the GEEB, the group was broken down into smaller breakout groups to explore four GEEB themes in more detail, including: Representation, Compensation, Health & Well-being, and Freedom from GBV. Participants were asked to: (1) review the current thinking around a particular theme, both as was presented by the WBA in the previous discussion as well as in the output gathered from the previous interactive session; (2) vote on the (sub)themes they felt were most important; and (3) discuss the most important themes in more detail. The feedback received on these themes is outlined below.

### **Representation:**

In the earlier, broader discussions around key themes faced by participants in their day-to-day, *Representation* was the most commonly referred to theme overall. In general, participants agreed that the *Representation* theme is well-captured in the current version of the GEEB. There was general discussion around *Representation* data specifically, which participants felt was the easiest data set to request from companies. That said, the group also felt that women's participation data, while "easy" to collect, lacked transparency and accountability, where in the company context it was either not openly shared or not linked to strategic decision making

respectively. Participants felt that company assessments should consider data which has been audited, to ensure it is reliable.

When considering all sub-themes within the *Representation* theme, participants felt the following were of highest priority:

- **Women in leadership** - With the greatest number of votes by far, women in leadership was the most popular sub-theme in the broader *Representation* theme. While there was general recognition of the importance of assessing relevant *discrimination-oriented policies* (e.g., diverse representation policy, fair career advancement policy, equal employment opportunity policy) and their link to broader government policies, some participants also noted the importance of assessing how these policies translate to tangible *targets and quotas* within companies. From here, *gender balance* throughout the company, at all leadership levels, was considered very important to assess. Several participants also noted the importance of tracking *promotion* in this context.
- **Supply chain diversity:** To a lesser degree though still important, participants felt that companies should be assessed on

## Deep-dive into select GEEB themes



the extent to which they help drive *supply chain diversity*. This can be assessed by looking at non-discrimination policies in its supply chain (including in Sourcing), its initiatives for inclusive procurement (including collaboration with women owned businesses or training to suppliers to prevent un/conscious gender bias) and/or gender-sensitive supply chain audits.

- **Gender stereotypes in marketing/advertising:** Finally, to a similar degree as supply chain diversity, participants agreed that companies should be assessed on whether they ensure their marketing and advertising activities do not reinforce existing gendered stereotypes by adopting different strategies such as screening.

A number of other sub-themes were discussed, but to a lesser degree, including: *recruitment* and *retention* strategies focused on increasing the number and tenure of women employees; *occupational segregation*, ensuring that women are participating across all departments/business units including product development; and women's equitable representation in *trade unions* (also noted in the *Legal Protection* theme).

### Compensation:

In the earlier, broader discussions, *Compensation* was the second most commonly referred to theme overall. Participants agreed that the GEEB's current approach to *Compensation* is directionally correct. As a starting point, participants felt it was important for a company to have clear policies and procedures related to pay equity and 'equal pay for equal work', as well as exercise pay transparency (which should be assessed in the context of pay transparency regulation). However, while commitment and transparency in the context of equitable remuneration was considered important, most of the discussion was centred around the remaining sub-themes. In order of priority as determined by the number of votes received from the group, these included:

- **Child/dependent care support** – The *Benefits* sub-theme was the most often addressed sub-theme overall in the previous discussion. However, when focusing on the *Compensation* theme alone, participants felt care support – including *maternity, paternity & parental leave, dependent care support* and *subsidized childcare* – was most critical to assess. Participants agreed that company policies towards supporting their employees for caretaking responsibilities and services for children and/or other dependents

## Deep-dive into select GEEB themes

including elderly relatives are important. Furthermore, the group agreed that companies should be monitored for the gender balance in the benefits offered as well as the percentage of usage of these benefits by their employees. The most important sub-theme overall and by far was the *provision of subsidised childcare*, which was identified as a ‘must-have’ theme.

- **Equal pay** – Both in the earlier group discussion as well as in the breakout session, *equal pay* received a significant number of mentions and votes. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that it is critical to assess among companies. Some also pointed out the importance of equal performance review standards in this context, which highlights the strong link between *equal pay* (in *Compensation*) and *promotion* (in *Representation*).
- **Contract types** – Additionally, in the context of *equitable remuneration*, *contract types* was also considered a “must-have” sub-theme by the group. Here, participants agreed that the rules and regulations relating to contract types are often followed by the parent company; however, their control across their supply chain is often inconsistent.

Here, the risk of exploitative sub-contracting is very real and should be actively addressed. That said, participants felt that, while critical, this is an area that will be challenging to gather data on. In addition, one participant mentioned how it will be interesting to know if a company even acknowledges the presence of the informal sector in their supply chain, as in most of the cases companies state that they are not accountable for sub-contractors.

“Training and mentorship programs are just a tool but not the outcome in most of the cases. What is the outcome of these training programs and do they result in equal progression is important to assess.”

- **Advancement opportunities (mentoring and sponsorship)**
  - To a lesser degree, and in the context of the *Education, Training & Mentoring* sub-theme, some participants discussed the importance of monitoring the extent to which companies provide women access to training and skill development. They also discussed that the focus should be

## Deep-dive into select GEEB themes



on the outcome of the training provided (and the extent to which it results in advancement opportunities) rather than on the provision of training alone. Furthermore, some participants noted the importance of distinguishing between *mentoring* (which may not necessarily open doors for better opportunities) and *endorsement/sponsorship* (which can be considered when assessing a company's culture and whether/not it encourages sponsorship).

Other important sub-themes mentioned by participants, though they received less votes, included *flexible work* policies (such as the provision of re-entry opportunities for female employees post-maternity leave), a *gender-balanced provision of benefits*, and the *provision of healthcare* benefits in particular.

### Health & Well-being

Overall, in the context of the opening discussion, (sub)themes in *Health & Well-being* were mentioned about half as much as those in *Representation* and *Compensation*. However, during the breakout sessions and within the *Health & Well-being* theme lies the single-most voted on sub-theme across the entire GEEB (access to reproductive healthcare).

**“I am excited that you have integrated health and reproductive health under gender equality which I have been waiting to hear for 10-15 years.”**

In general, the group felt that there is a lack of understanding as to why business should care about women's health. That said, participants expressed a general optimism around women's health & well-being “finally” being thoughtfully considered in the context of a company assessment, and there was very rich discussion around how it should be properly assessed. Interestingly, while the broader group addressed the *physical (workplace) conditions* and *health information & services* sub-themes equally, the great majority of the votes (and conversation) in this breakout session were centred around *health information & services* specifically. This may reflect the growing desire and need (certainly on the part of women's health experts) to assess a company's role in providing access to health information and services, particularly when it comes to reproductive health. With this in mind, the highest priority sub-themes that were discussed included:

- **Access to reproductive healthcare** – By far the most popular sub-theme overall, there was general (and strong) consensus

## Deep-dive into select GEEB themes



among the group around the need to assess companies on the extent to which they support women's *access to reproductive healthcare* – including, among others, family planning support, modern contraception and menstrual health management. Participants discussed the importance of framing health *information* as a fundamental part of care and service *provision*. They also discussed how access to this form of care can either take the shape of on-site health *facilities or referrals* to (easily accessible) facilities off-site.

- **Quality of workplace healthcare professionals** – While this had not been explicitly highlighted before, a number of participants stressed the need to assess not just the access to and provision of health information and services, but also the quality of that care. In factories in particular, there appears a common misunderstanding for what “good healthcare” is; and while factories may offer healthcare services, it is of such limited quality that it doesn't necessarily qualify as reasonable healthcare at all. Participants felt strongly about the need to assess the qualifications and skills of on-site healthcare professionals, particularly in (garment) factories, certainly as the current audit system does not screen for this.

- **Mental Health & Well-being** – Finally, though to a lesser degree, participants discussed the importance of access to affordable mental healthcare. They also discussed a growing need and interest in understanding how and the extent to which employee (satisfaction) surveys can help, and which current tools/approaches most effectively address this.

In addition to the sub-themes mentioned above, there was some conversation on the importance of *flexible work* options that can complement improved access to health information and services. Namely, they discussed the importance of women being afforded the flexibility to get to health-related appointments or information sessions during working hours.

### **Freedom from GBV**

In general, the *Freedom from GBV* theme was addressed to about the same extent as the *Health & Well-being* theme. In this breakout session, participants discussed the following highest priority sub-themes:

- **GBV prevention** – Participants strongly agreed on the importance of assessing the extent to which a company is helping

## Deep-dive into select GEEB themes

prevent gender-based violence. There was a lack of clear consensus on what prevention exactly means, with most addressing it very broadly. However, some participants did discuss the importance of ensuring a safe workplace that is free from violence and sexual exploitation, and that minimizes the risk of isolation in the workplace where such violations may be more likely to take place.

- **Commitment to, and policies on, freedom from GBV** – Unlike with most other themes where commitment-oriented sub-themes were seen as less crucial, there was broad support for the importance of a company’s commitment to *Freedom from GBV*. In particular, participants discussed the importance of company policies on sexual harassment, including policies addressing zero tolerance and forced arbitration.

The remaining sub-themes, which collected half as many votes as those above, included: safe transport to/from work, particularly late at night; reliable (and anonymous) grievance mechanisms, particularly for sexual harassment; and adequate support for victims of GBV in the forms of services, sick/compassionate leave, and post-grievance retention support.



## Next steps



We are very pleased with the tone, breadth and depth of the discussions held in Vancouver which, when combined with the energy of the Women Deliver 2019 conference that followed, have landed us in a very good place. This convening has offered both the rich feedback and motivation needed in the coming months, which will be intensive. During this time, we will:

- 1. Move from the “what” to the “how.”** Having iterated quite extensively on the “must-have” versus “nice-to-have” themes, we will begin to shift away from *what* we will measure (e.g., priority themes and sub-themes) to *how* we will measure them. This will require translating the (sub)themes that have been identified to actual indicators across the full value chain. To do so, we will continue to leverage our extensive research, namely our mapping of the multitude of leading gender equality and empowerment work, in order to use this extensive (and robust) knowledge base as our foundation. We will also consult with leading gender experts globally on an as-needed basis, building on conversations that have already taken place.
- 2. Continue our targeted engagement.** Since our Mumbai roundtable, around which we determined we would focus on the Apparel industry first, we began more actively engaging with

global Apparel companies to socialize our work and invite their participation and feedback during the methodology development phase of our work and beyond. We will continue, and amplify, these efforts with an aim to engage with all target companies and actively listen to and learn from them. Further, we will continue to engage the (gender lens/smart) investment community, in our efforts to build a movement that values the data, transparency and accountability we are working to drive. Finally, we will continue to work with leading gender experts globally, both to inform our GEEB indicator development as well as build on (and actively align with) their work wherever possible.

- 3. Finalise our draft GEEB methodology.** We will synthesize all of this work into a draft GEEB methodology that will first be reviewed by our Expert Review Committee (ERC) later this year. After having captured their feedback, we will publish a Draft Methodology which will be made available for Public Consultation, inviting any and all feedback from around the globe.

As always, we welcome any feedback on the GEEB. Should you have any thoughts to share, please contact Danielle Burt at [d.burt@worldbenchmarkingalliance.org](mailto:d.burt@worldbenchmarkingalliance.org).

# List of participating organisations



**Banyan Global**

**BSR**

**Catalyst at Large**

**Criterion Institute**

**Global Compact Network Canada**

**Inditex**

**International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)**

**International Trade Centre**

**Labournet**

**Lunapads**

**Meridian**

**Nexial**

**Patamar Capital**

**PVH**

**Small Enterprise Assistance Funds (SEAF)**

**Society for Canadian Women in Science & Technology (SCWIST)**

**State observatory for migrations in Santa Catarina and Federal**

**University of Santa Catarina, Brazil**

**Tara Health Foundation**

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**

**United Nations Global Compact (UNGC)**

**Vancity Investment Management**

**WD Young Leaders**

**WeConnect**