

# A MULTI-ACTOR PARTNERSHIP ON GENDER-SENSITIVE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (OSH)

## The business case

BY ALINA MATT



## UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

### ARTICLE 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience [...].

### ARTICLE 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. [...]

### ARTICLE 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. [...]

### ARTICLE 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.



A gender lens reveals:  
OSH is more than fire safety.

## CORPORATE BENEFITS OF GENDER-SENSITIVE OSH SYSTEMS

### WHY INVEST IN BETTER OSH?

A strong OSH system throughout the value chain assists companies with attaining legal compliance - especially against the backdrop of the German Supply Chain Act on human rights due diligence and the forthcoming European regulation. In order to fulfil corporate due diligence, it is crucial to integrate “gender dimensions” such as gender responsive assessments as well as gender transformative remedies and other measures. That is also underlined by the UN working groups’ Gender [Guidance for the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#).

Effective and sound OSH systems also provide benefits beyond legal compliance. They contribute to reduced staff turnover rates, potential increases in productivity, and sustainable improvements in the quality of work within the value chains, even in locations which are not always within the radar of high management personnel. Additionally, sound OSH systems are capable of revealing problems at an early stage, thereby reducing the risks, unnecessary costs, and delays related to production. By aiding in addressing problems for workers in the supply chain early on, OSH systems also serve as a means of avoiding public harm to the brand name. OSH successes can be easily communicated to relevant stakeholders.

However, to achieve these benefits, OSH systems must be built and used in a way that can truly point out the most important problems in the workplace. While industry actors have engaged in OSH, to date, most efforts focus on “safety”, e.g. fire safety, machine maintenance, or the safety of the building. While these aspects are of course important, such a narrow focus overlooks the prevailing problems of the majority of the workforce. As a result, these efforts remain partly ineffective in addressing workers’ needs. A fundamental reason for this is that such efforts are gender blind. This is explicitly problematic because OSH systems all over the world are largely created from a male perspective. This also applies to the footwear and garment sector, where a majority of the workforce in most tiers of the value chain are female.

The key to constructing better OSH systems is therefore investment in a gender lens. Only then can OSH systems respond more effectively to

workers’ needs and allow the efficient use of company resources invested in OSH systems. For the optimal outcome in worker and supply chain performance, businesses should inquire directly into how gender is intersectionally linked with other possible discrimination risks such as those based on disabilities, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or migration status.

## MOVING AHEAD WITH A MULTI-ACTOR PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

### WHAT IS THE MULTI ACTOR PARTNERSHIP (MAP) ON GENDER-SENSITIVE OSH?

The MAP establishes structures to achieve sustainable and long-term improvements in OSH, particularly in the garment and footwear industry. Gender-specific health risks are identified and analyzed. The MAP is steered by experienced and critical observers of the industry. Solution-oriented dialogues between relevant stakeholders at both the local and international level lead to the development of hands-on guidelines to improve the health of workers. The MAP aims at the implementation of these guidelines in pilots to show the way for the whole industry.

### BENEFITS OF THE MAP APPROACH

The MAP offers short and early access to the latest findings in the field of gender-sensitive OSH. With its design, the project provides the opportunity to dive into particular regional dynamics in important production regions, but it also allows for an overarching perspective on sector specific dynamics. The research findings of project partners, CIVIDEP in India and Trade Union Rights Center (TURC) in Indonesia, have just revealed problems going far beyond the obvious safety concerns. They include, among others: severely high numbers of miscarriages experienced by female workers, reports on short-sighted decision-making, and the malfunctioning of health clinics at production sites. With their studies, the MAP partners identify current, concrete action areas based on deeply informed sector-specific data. The MAP approach paves the way for the interpretation and contextualization of those findings utilizing the knowledge of different stakeholder groups.

Within the industry, increasing skepticism about the transformational potential of isolated

OSH SYSTEMS ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE LARGELY CREATED FROM A MALE PERSPECTIVE

THE MAP BUILDS BRIDGES TO WORKERS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

## ONE PARTNERSHIP, FOUR ACTION AREAS

### IMPROVED KNOWLEDGE

- Desk and field research
- Group discussions and interviews with stakeholders, trade unions, and experts
- Periodical newsletter
- Research reports

### STRENGTHENED CAPACITIES

- Internal capacity building
- Working group on gender data
- Regular exchanges with peers and project team
- Latest information during events
- Collective creation of guidelines in regional groups
- Trainings on guidelines

### IMPROVED MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

- Continuous bilateral exchange
- Dialogue in core groups in India and Indonesia
- Networks and discussions in international Dialogue Forums

### PILOT PROJECTS

(with few selected stakeholders)

- Adaptation of the general guidelines
- Kick-off workshop
- Implementing the pilot



**Often overlooked in OSH procedures:**  
The times to drink and to use the restrooms should be fundamental parts of occupational health standards.

social audits is accompanied by a growing interest in workers' voice approaches. The MAP builds bridges to workers and their representatives in production regions in India and Indonesia. Establishing contact with workers, trade unions, human rights groups, medical experts, interested factory management, and other local stakeholders, the MAP helps to establish local networks that foster meaningful engagement.

From the outset, the project has considered the needs of all relevant stakeholders, such as workers, fashion brands, retailers, factory management, local trade unions, existing multi-stakeholder initiatives and civil society organizations. In this regard, the MAP not only fosters exchange and collective action but also generates motivation for achieving high-quality results. Collectively, it is easier to overcome hurdles, such as reaching out to stakeholders who are difficult to connect with, or organizing external support for problems that could result in dead ends if worked on in isolation.

Furthermore, knowledge sharing reduces staff costs, e.g. the sharing of important events, existing tools and experience. Even with limited resources for corporate social responsibility engagement beyond legal liability, the project structure allows for contact with key stakeholders and issue-centric, forward-looking work. Project structures allow different levels of engagement and commitment depending on company's strategic decisions and

#### AT A GLANCE

### FIVE REASONS TO JOIN THE MAP ON GENDER-SENSITIVE OSH TO CREATE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

- OSH systems become more effective through a gender-lens.
- The MAP builds bridges to workers and their representatives in production regions.
- Participants learn from each other and follow latest conversations.
- Collaboration on the cutting-edge topic helps to find solutions better and faster.
- Project structures lead the way to implementation and easier upscaling of successes.

#### AT A GLANCE

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- Subscribe to the [newsletter](#) and follow [#WorkersHealthMatters](#) on social media
- Attend the Dialogue Forum events
- Read published research and other project materials
- Participate in an international working group on gender data in the context of OSH
- Get involved with your suppliers or company-owned production facilities in the country specific project groups in India or Indonesia
- Participate in the development of the guidelines
- Apply the guidelines in pilot projects
- or simply contact us for a bilateral dialogue!

possibilities (see box on opportunities for collaboration). Participation in the project is free of charge, which may reduce additional costs for external consulting and other services.

### FINANCIAL ASPECTS

The project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It was initiated in late 2021 and its primary phase will run until the end of 2024. There are no participation fees for companies or other stakeholders who wish to participate.

### LIMITATIONS AND PROJECT RISKS

To the best of the author's knowledge, the following risks and limitations exist. The success of the project depends on the participation of the stakeholders. Therefore, a certain level of human resources is required by each company attending, and there must be a willingness from each company to investigate its own supply chain and the way in which things have been done in the past. When investing in a particular supplier/buyer relationship, the company commits to a business partner and region. Some uncertainties regarding the transferability of learnings (e.g., to other regions) exist. These are partly mitigated by the fact that project structures span multiple production regions and business relationship experiences. ♦

Who has a **VOICE**  
in your **OSH**  
system?



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#### PROJECT PARTNERS



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