

Thesis On
Measuring Gender Equality Practices In The Workplace: A Focus On UN Global Compact
Network Bangladesh Member Companies and External Private Sector Businesses In Bangladesh

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A thesis submitted to Brac Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Bachelor of Business Administration

Brac Business School
Brac University
January 2022

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The internship report submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The report does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The report does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

Ayesha Abdullah

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Letter of Transmittal

Ummul Wara Adrita
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Subject: Submission of the internship thesis on “Measuring Gender Equality Practices In The Workplace: A Focus On UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh Member Companies and External Private Sector Businesses In Bangladesh”

Dear Madam,

For your consideration, I am submitting my internship thesis titled “Measuring Gender Equality Practices In The Workplace: A Focus On UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh Member Companies and External Private Sector Businesses In Bangladesh.” The thesis has been written in accordance with BRAC University's requirements for the spring semester of 2022.

I have attempted my best to finish the report with the essential data and recommended proposition in as significant a compact and comprehensive manner as possible.

I trust that the report will meet the desired requirements.

Sincerely yours,

Ayesha Tomalea Abdullah

Ayesha Tomalea Abdullah
18104117
BRAC Business School
BRAC University
Date: February 11, 2021

Non-Disclosure Agreement

This agreement is made and entered into by and between the UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh and the undersigned student at Brac University.

Ayesha Tomalea Abdullah

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Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my internship academic supervisor, Ms. Ummul Wara Adrita, without whom this research paper would not have been possible. I am also thankful to my line manager and on-site supervisors Mr. Ashfaq Nafi and Mr. Mohammad Sheen, who have provided unconditional support and guidance throughout the research process. I would also like to acknowledge the primary participants in this research, including the UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh member companies across several private sector business industries in Bangladesh, as well as the private survey respondents in various industries who have provided their information transparently in order to become a part of this research paper.

Executive Summary

The aim of this research project is to gain a deeper understanding of corporate initiatives towards gender equality and equal opportunities. The project will investigate the key actions being taken by Global Compact Network Bangladesh (GCNB) member companies and external private sector companies across the country and the existing policies they have in place in order to promote equal opportunities. It also explores the marketplace initiatives being implemented in order to achieve this goal. The project will also focus on the UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh's features surrounding gender equality and targeting gender equality, including workshops, and worldwide equality initiatives. To collect the appropriate data, a primary and secondary quantitative research method technique is used. To obtain primary research data, a survey with detailed questions is utilized. The secondary quantitative research data is sourced from questionnaire data conducted by the UN Global Compact Bangladesh. To analyze the data, a frequency analysis will be used for our study. The study and research will focus on understanding the percentage of companies from a random sample's focus on gender equality initiatives. This shift in corporate mindset is essential to understand as gender factors in Bangladesh continue to change as education and society develops. The study revealed several problem areas. Areas such as maternity and paternity leave, professional development and more are common and in need of improvement among the 29 respondents. On the other end, the study also reflects the areas that are excelling, such as the deep implementation of foundational policies. The study intends to inform marketers and private sector businesses in identifying areas for development when it comes to corporate morals, policies and initiatives, in order to sustain and develop the next generation of employees, and also tailor products and business processes to conform to societal expectations such as gender equality.

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List of Acronyms

UN	United Nations
ILO	International Labour Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
RMG	Ready-made Garments
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
FMCG	Fast Moving Consumer Goods
IT	Information Technology

Introduction

Gender equality initiatives in the workplace dictates that all genders receive the same benefits, opportunities, rewards and materials to excel at a company. This often includes professional development programs for both genders, equality when it comes to remuneration and benefits, and balanced roles in the workplace with comparable responsibilities. It also means that both genders are given the same opportunities to progress promotion and career wise within the organization, and employees are given the same importance irrespective of gender.

Over the last decade, Bangladesh has continued to struggle with gender inequality in the workplace. Despite persistent actions and initiatives taken by multinational corporate leaders and social movements, inequality continues to exist. Some especially hard-hitting issues include large gender wage gaps, inconsistent sexual harrasment mediation in the workplace, a lack of professional development opportunities for women, negligent maternity policies and a lack of transparency when it comes to gender related issues.

However, despite the problems, over the years, as time has progressed, more companies have been taking initiatives to instill the practices and mindset of gender equality. As the country's literacy rates continue to improve, more of the country is slowly becoming a workforce for the nation, and more trends of gender inclusivity are being seen in the corporate world. There has also been a consistent effort in the public and socially when it comes to equal initiatives. By assessing their current standpoint and assessing areas and initiatives where there are lackings, inequality issues can be significantly tackled by promoting transparency, conducting research, and by involving key stakeholders in gender equality improvements and initiatives.

Aim & Objective

Broad Objective: To understand the different gender equality and equal opportunity initiatives being undertaken in private sector businesses in Bangladesh, as well as the different policies, functions and processes they have in place in order to combat gender discrimination in Bangladesh's corporate sector. Along with understanding the existing initiatives, also identifying and analyzing the areas where improvement is needed in terms of gender equality initiatives.

Specific Objectives:

- What gender equality practices are common in companies in Bangladesh?
- What are the range of gender equality initiatives being undertaken in the Bangladeshi workplace?
- Which areas can companies improve their gender equality practices in?
- Understanding the frequency pattern of gender equality practices in the private sector of Bangladesh
- Which gender equality initiatives are the least common in terms of frequency?

Literature Review

The Importance Of Gender Equality Initiatives In The Workplace

In order to grow and develop as a nation, gender equality initiatives are extremely important in the workplace. The UN recognizes gender equality across all forms as one of its main sustainable development goals, and underlines gender equality in the workplace as one of the essential factors towards development, as outlined in SDG goal 5.5 [6].

By working towards gender inclusivity, workplaces can increase productivity, minimize conflict, and result in a wider talent pool overall. According to a survey conducted by Indeed, one of the largest recruitment organizations in the world, gender diversity has also become a trait more than 55% of job seekers seek out when applying to jobs [5]. By allowing women to participate fully in the economy, waves can be made in terms of the economy and GDP. According to a study by McKinsey and Company, it is estimated that the gross domestic product (GDP) across the world would receive an addition of USD \$28 trillion if women were to actively participate in paid work and also earn equal pay simultaneously. This would signify a 26% increase in the GDP by 2025 [7]. An additional report by McKinsey also notes profitability would increase by 21% if the same actions were to take place [7]. It can also be referenced that according to the aforementioned reports, “both advanced and developing countries stand to gain” largely from gender equality initiatives in the workplace [7]. Apart from financial and growth incentives, gender equality brings a number of developments and positive attributes to workplaces, including but not limited to increased growth and innovation, improved productivity, and a more stable workforce [9]. As countries across the world and primarily Bangladesh continue to work towards gender equality in the workplace, identifying areas for improvement and current standings remain as important as ever, especially with many closing the gap significantly as the modern world evolves. With Bangladesh being the benchmark and leader in closing the gender gap in the South Asian region [4], it becomes increasingly important for corporations and businesses in the country to take more initiatives surrounding gender equality.

Methods To Gender Equality In The Workplace

There are several areas of a working business that can implement gender equality initiatives in order to create a well rounded experience for both genders in the workforce. According to the global gender gap report 2021, Bangladesh as a country still has several areas to improve on when it comes to economic participation for women. The largest decline in 2021 for Bangladesh was the decline in the share of women participating as professional and technical workers, with the percentage declining from 29.6% to 24.3% [4]. In addition to this, labor force participation also dropped significantly, with only 38.5% of women actively participating [4]. Due to these declining statistics, it is essential to improve on the main components of gender equality. Gender equality can be obtained in the fundamentals of a business, in its relationship with marketplace stakeholders, through transparency to the board, and also by considering external factors such as health, safety, hygiene and more.

The main recurring themes of initiatives in the workplace can be broken down into four main components as cited by Indeed, the four components being “Pay,” “Leadership,” “Hiring,” and “Inclusion.” [5]. Initiatives for pay include closing the wage gap, and reviewing the company’s stance towards equal pay. This may also mean looking into the respective company’s code of conduct, and writing equal pay policies into the policy. Another essential step towards equality in pay would be to eliminate pay secrecy. This comes with being more transparent with the respective boards and also publishing pay brackets in order to provide more clarity for employees. When it comes to leadership, companies can look into their training and consider updating them to improve employee behavior. Companies may also make this training a mandatory initiative in order to make their first step towards diversity [5].

To excel further, they may also consider conducting leadership training for women especially, in order to fill the gap where women have not received the same opportunities as their male colleagues. In terms of recruitment, the UN Global Compact Network encourages interview boards with equal genders on the panel, the elimination of biased questions such as those concerning marriage and maternity, and taking proactive steps to recruit women at all levels as well as underrepresented roles [8]. Lastly, to promote inclusion, companies can promote an open environment in the workplace where employees feel comfortable to express their desires regarding equality [9]. Additionally, equal treatment, the promotion of a work life balance and steady mentorship will also allow diverse employees in the workforce to feel truly included.

The Current Situation In Bangladesh

Throughout the last decade, gender equality has been a consistent problem across the corporate sector in Bangladesh. In the most recent year of 2021, discriminatory practices and norms have seen no change in comparison to the year of 2017, remaining at 57% in the south asian region [1]. As of 2019, gender wage gaps between men and women remain at a high standpoint, with the latter receiving a 21% lower wage in comparison to the opposite sex [2]. Trends have also observed that 50% of women are hired more consistently in multinational companies and in RMG factories, compared to traditional corporate businesses in Bangladesh [3]. According to a 2019 survey by the ILO, 87.5% workers across the industries of manufacturing, electricity and natural supplies, construction, retail and more are males, further signifying the lack of female participants in the country [2]. Gender equality has been an especially prevalent issue in Bangladesh's corporate sector.

According to the world gender gap report by the world economic forum, Bangladesh's standpoint has reduced by 15 positions in comparison to the results of 2020, with Bangladesh currently holding the 65th position in the The Global Gender Gap Index 2021 rankings. In comparison to 2006, Bangladesh has managed to rise in the rankings, however a deduction from the previous years indicates a reduction in development when it comes to closing the gap. According to the index, women also make up only 11% of managerial roles in Bangladesh as of 2021, where in comparison, the world's leading countries have women in 80% or more managerial roles across several industries [4]. Overall, women are only earning 40.3% of the income men do in the country [4]. This indicates several areas of improvement for Bangladesh, especially the foundational goals of closing the gap, encouraging equal pay, and allowing women to take the lead more often in workplace settings. In the current standing of Bangladesh, tools such as the WEPs tool by the UN Global Compact Network and external studies assessing the current standpoint are essential to understand the current scenario and areas of improvement, so that companies may move forward and develop themselves and keep up with generational changes. As the world continues to work towards the sustainable development goals set forward by the UN, is it important for private sector businesses to also play their part [8].

Methodology

The methodology primarily follows a quantitative research method. An online survey questionnaire on the Google Forms platform was used to gather primary data. The questionnaire consisted of 28 questions separated into categories of gender equality initiatives relevant to the workplace. The questions in the survey are modeled after the WEPs Gender Analysis tool created by the UN Global Compact.

The categories included “Foundational” to assess the existing policies in place, “Violence & Harrassment” to assess the mediation policies for sexual harassment and bias, “Equal Opportunity” to asses the equal opportunity policies in place, “Marketplace” to assess company gender initiatives in relation to suppliers and vendors, “Recruitment” to assess initiatives concerning the respective company’s hiring process and talent acquisition, “Professional Development” to assess professional skill initiatives for both genders, “Compensation” to assess equal pay and wage gap mediation initiatives, “Partnerships” to assess stakeholder and external relationships surrounding gender, and a future development question aimed towards understanding whether companies are open to learning in the future.

The questions were also designed to reflect on the literature research conducted. Both purposive sampling and simple random sampling were utilized as research samples techniques in this study. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh member companies were well represented. The UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh member companies are also a well-defined sample as members include large corporations, SMEs, small businesses, and medium sized businesses in industries ranging from telecommunications, IT, FMCG, banking and more. A combination of simple random sampling was also used in order to eradicate judgment of error and to receive a broad range and correctly reflect the representation of the population. In simple random sampling, the primary target group were private sector companies and businesses in Bangladesh.

29 responses were collected from Bangladesh's companies and industries. Both groups were given the same questionnaire in order to match equity in this study. The responders were given 28 "yes" and "no" answer questions relating to different current, future and past gender equality initiatives and policies present in their company. Furthermore, a frequency analysis and graphical representations will be included in the research to reflect the consistency within the sample and to highlight the common and uncommon excerpts from the study. In addition to the analysis, Microsoft Excel was used to graph the representation of data and create data tables signifying it.

Research Instrument/Questionnaire

The survey focused on the international standards the UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh holds developing countries to in order to progress in their gender equality initiatives in the workplace. It is part of a larger sustainable development goals set by the United Nations. The survey also focused on a survey of literature. All respondents of the survey understood the questionnaire well and in English.

Research Hypothesis & Analysis Method

Hypothesis: More than 50% of respondent companies lack initiative wise, especially when it comes to the areas of maternity rights and marketplace gender equality initiatives.

The research will be analyzed through a frequency analysis with frequency counts and percentages. The percentages for specific questions will also be analyzed closely in order to understand the disbursement of the data obtained.

The following formula will be used to calculate the percentages in the analysis:

$$\text{Percentage: } \frac{x}{\Sigma x} \cdot 100\%$$

Analysis and Findings/Results

Companies in Bangladesh have a long history of focusing on certain aspects on the gender equality spectrum, and leaving some lacking as a result. Companies are also consistently influenced by each other, as when a specific company carries out well thought out initiatives, it becomes a benchmark, especially for similar companies competing for the same applicants in their target group, or the same consumers in their target group. Before understanding the types of companies who are focusing on gender equality more, it is important to assess where Bangladeshi private companies stand as of 2021. Below are the frequency of gender equality initiatives observed out of 29 respondent companies, representing the FMCG, SME, IT, Advertising, Fintech, Distribution, Telecommunications, RMG, Frozen Food and Banking industries.

Table 1: Frequency Analysis & Percentage of “Yes” and “No” Respondents

Category	Variable	Frequency of "Yes" Respondents	Percentage of "Yes" Respondents (%)	Frequency of "No" Respondents	Percentage of "No" Respondents (%)
Foundational	Does your company have a policy that approaches the health, and safety needs of women at work?	18	62.07	11	37.93
	Does your company have a policy that ensures an environment free of violence and sexual harassment for women and men?	21	72.41	8	27.59
	Does your company have an approach that ensures gender diversity in professional development initiatives across the company?	19	65.52	10	34.48
	Does your company have an approach that ensures men and women employees are compensated equally?	18	62.07	11	37.93
	Does your company have a policy that ensures gender diversity in recruitment policies or processes?	19	65.52	10	34.48
	Does your company have a policy that ensures support to parents and caregivers?	7	24.14	22	75.86

Foundational

	Does your company support paid maternity leave?	8	27.59	21	72.41
	Does your company have an equal opportunity policy?	18	62.07	11	37.93
	If your company possesses an equal opportunity policy, is the policy well communicated to all current and potential employees in the company?	18	62.07	11	37.93
	Does your company provide training that focuses on non-discrimination and equal opportunity?	11	37.93	18	62.07
	Does your company have an internal or external grievance and mechanism in place for conflict resolution relating to gender discrimination (confidential mechanism)?	12	41.38	17	58.62
Marketplace Overview	Does your company encourage suppliers and vendors to improve performance on gender equality and work more towards it through different initiatives?	5	17.24	24	82.76
	Does your company have a policy that ensures an approach towards responsible marketing that considers the portrayal of gender stereotypes?	16	55.17	13	44.83
	Does your company assess the different impacts on women and men when developing products and/or services for the company?	14	48.28	15	51.72
Recruitment	Does your company have an approach towards ensuring gender-balanced interview panels during the hiring process?	14	48.28	15	51.72
	Does your company ensure that both women and men candidates are shortlisted for interviews?	18	62.07	11	37.93
	Does your company take proactive and effective steps to recruit women at all levels?	12	41.38	17	58.62
	Does your company take proactive and effective steps to recruit women in traditionally underrepresented roles?	9	31.03	20	68.97
	Does your company forbid inquiring about the status or plans of marriage, pregnancy or care responsibilities in job applications or during interview processes?	14	48.28	15	51.72
Professional Development	Does your company offer mentoring or training programs with specific support for women?	10	34.48	19	65.52
	Does your company offer specific programs to build the pipeline of qualified women for management/ senior leadership level positions and assist them in working towards promotions?	10	34.48	19	65.52
Compensation	Does your company report to their respective board on the overall ratio and ratio by employee level of basic salary and remuneration of women to men?	10	34.48	19	65.52
	Does your company have proactive procedures in place to remediate pay inequalities for employees?	10	34.48	19	65.52
Violence & Sexual Harassment	Does your company have a zero tolerance policy for all forms of violence to all employees, including sexual harassment, and engaging in acts of sexual exploitation of women and girls?	21	72.41	8	27.59
Partnerships	Does your company partner with organizations or other companies to improve gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives?	12	41.38	17	58.62
	Does your company participate in multi-stakeholder platforms promoting the rights of	12	41.38	17	58.62

	women and girls?				
	Does your company consult with external stakeholders to understand the opportunities available to empower women and girls?	8	27.59	21	72.41
Future	Is your company open to learning more on positive gender equality practices?	21	72.41	8	27.59

The table above highlights the comprehensive current standing of companies in different aspects of gender equality. As seen in the data, companies tend to be more well versed in tackling violence and sexual harassment, and the fundamental equality policies, with the majority of respondents possessing a policy against violence in the workplace. Private sector respondents also seem to focus more on achieving the bare minimum, ensuring that the policies in place deem them as socially acceptable. Unfortunately, most companies do not venture towards the extra mile when it comes to development for women, failing to conduct professional development training, making space in under traditional roles and more initiatives, where only 30% to 40% of survey respondents achieve professional development for women in the workplace. However despite this overall analysis, we can also observe that 72% of companies are willing to learn and take more steps towards female empowerment in the future, and are open to practicing gender equality on a larger scale. This signifies the interest and main beliefs present in companies.

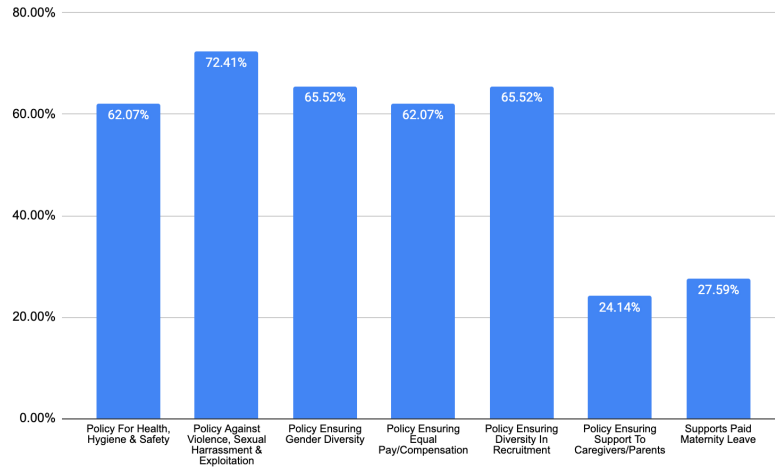


Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents With Policies In Place

Figure 1 demonstrates the number of companies from the survey who have respective foundational policies in place in the workplace. As seen in the data, over 50% of companies possess most of the policies concerning health, hygiene, safety, violence, sexual harassment, gender diversity, and equal pay and compensation. Sexual violence and harassment takes the lead, with most respondents having a policy in place for the respective violence.

There are many reasons as to why companies make sure to implement this particular policy, including good relationships in public relations, as well as their portrayal of potential talent in the job market. It is also an ethical obligation for companies among the private sector in Bangladesh. These count as the basic codes of conduct that should be present in equal opportunity employers, in order to conform to gender laws and the morals in the society. However, as seen in the data, only 24% to 27% of respondents have a policy in place to support maternity leave and caregivers. This is an area where most companies in Bangladesh have failed to take the lead, and is a discussion in international studies as of recent. Many industries in Bangladesh, especially the

RMG sector which is one of the largest, are very much dependent on their female workforce. However, due to stagnant maternity work policy development, many women are forced to leave their jobs or are terminated from their positions due to being in a state of maternity [10]. According to the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006, article 45, women employees are rightfully given 120 days of maternity leave. Despite the implemented law, the majority of companies do not implement the full 120 days and provide unfair treatment to women employees [10]. Maternity and paternity leave is definitely an area where the industry falls short and must conform to the proper laws. This area leaves something to consider for not only multinational companies represented in the data, but local companies and SMEs as well.

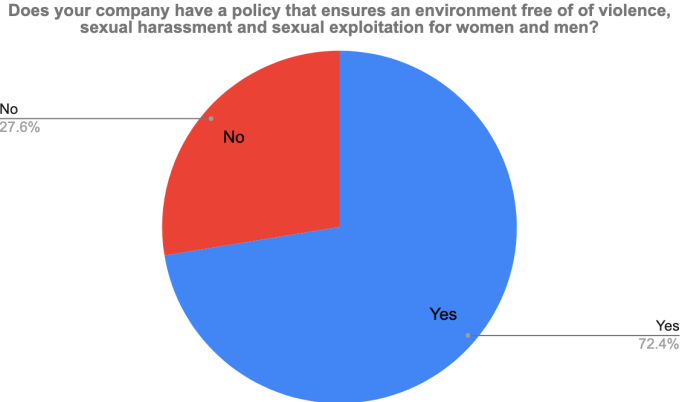


Figure 2: The Majority Of Respondents Have A Harassment In Place

Figure 2 displays the percentage of respondents who have a policy in place to ensure an atmosphere free of violence, sexual harassment and exploitation. In a patriarchal society as the one existent in Bangladesh, sexual exploitation and harassment is a large concern, especially in the blue collar industries such as the ready made garments industry, industrial businesses and the private sector. In the midst of Covid-19, a study conducted by the National Girlchild Advocacy Forum, Plan Bangladesh and Girls Advocacy

Alliance surveying 135 working women across 6 districts in Bangladesh observed that 22.96% of respondents went through a certain form of sexual harassment while working [11].

Statistics such as this display the need for policies against sexual harassment which most of the 29 respondents in the survey have managed to implement. The implementation of policies such as this signify a positive sign and an optimistic future towards the changing gender gap, especially within multinational companies and the private sector. This area is an area covered by most companies and is an exemplary sign of the continuous improvement needed in the Bangladeshi workplace.

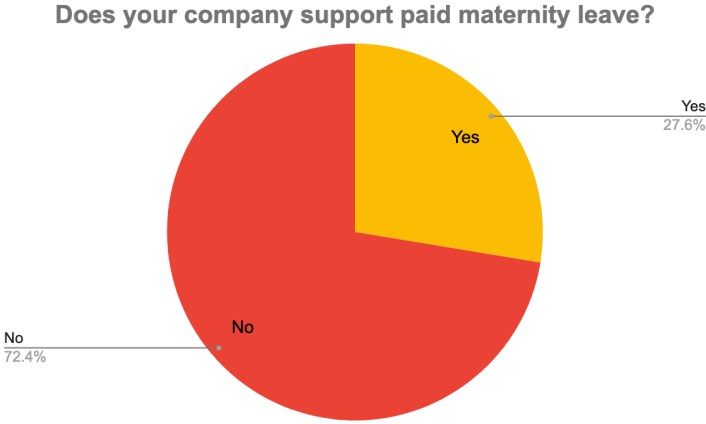


Figure 3: Respondents Supporting Paid Maternity Leave

Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents supporting paid maternity leave in their workplace. Unfortunately as observed by the data, this number is very low among the 29 respondents and is an area most businesses can improve on. Only 27.6% or 8 companies among respondents have a paid maternity leave policy in place. This is one of the weakest areas for respondents, according to the data retrieved from the primary survey. The reasons behind this observation can be due to a number of causes. In most workplaces, the company does not want to take liability for employees who are not actively working in the workplace for a certain time.

This bias negatively impacts working mothers who are forced to resign or are terminated by their workplaces. As can be seen by trends in the past, Bangladeshi businesses are not very focused on employee well-being and satisfaction, and have a more productivity driven and results based workplace.

Employers fail to understand that insufficient maternity leave also impacts productivity in a negative way, taking away time from bonding and leaving a larger pressure on fathers to make up for the income loss that comes as a result of poor maternity leave policies. It also leaves a pessimistic mental impact on loyal female workers who have attributed largely to workforces, who are left feeling underrepresented and unvalued in the long run. This area is a large space for improvement for local companies, who along with progressive marketing ideation and employer branding should begin at the core and reconsider basic policies such as these.

Table 2: Parental & Caregiver Support

Question	Yes	Percentage Of Yes	No	Percentage Of No
Does your company have a policy that ensures support to parents and caregivers?	7	24.14	22	75.86

According to the primary data retrieved, Table 2 displays another weak point for respondent companies observed in the survey. Along with weak maternity leave policies, more than 70% of respondent companies also fail to provide support to parents and caregivers who have wards dependent on them.

Extra support and a family-friendly workplace is essential for companies to maintain a good employee-employer relationship. This area continues to be a sector where private companies can improve in the upcoming years.

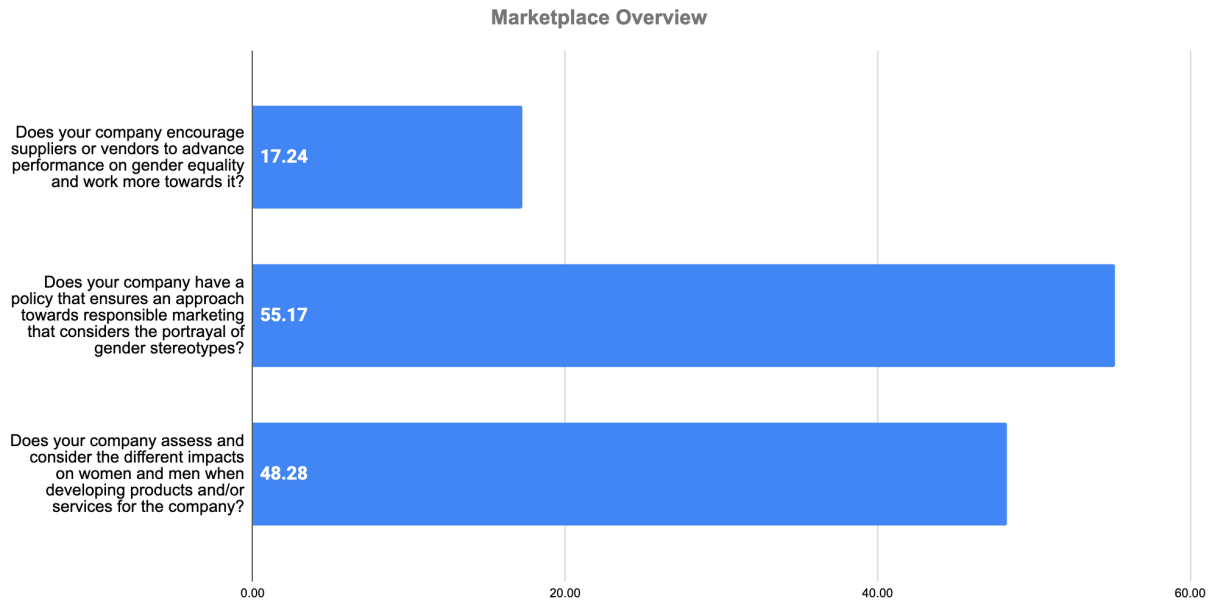


Figure 4: Marketplace Overview

In the marketplace overview category, we can observe the percentage of respondent companies who go above and beyond when it comes to the initiatives at the workplace. The marketplace overview survey questions inquire into a businesses suppliers, and whether a company is proactively ensuring that vendors and suppliers are equally conscious regarding gender equality. It also looks into the marketing initiatives a company publicizes, and the thoughts behind the product manufacturing process and product development. At present in Bangladesh, marketing agencies, collaboration with marketing agencies and in depth marketing are trending, with more and more private sector businesses conducting marketing campaigns regularly.

As a factor in this, it is important for companies to ensure that they portray themselves as an equal opportunity employer, and to ensure that the supply chain process includes vendors who are equal

opportunists. As observed in the primary survey and Figure 4, more than 50% of respondent companies, or approximately 16 out of 29 respondent companies, ensure bias-free, responsible marketing when advertising their product or service.

However, in contrast to that, only about 17% of respondent companies ensure that their suppliers are systemically gender bias-free as well, indicating that this is another area private sector businesses must look into when creating their policies for the future. Another helpful and interesting insight is that mostly multinational companies and larger companies are able to ensure the quality of their suppliers. This may also indicate a factor that provides an explanation into why other businesses are unable to do so, as SMEs and smaller businesses may not have the same access to the same resources, and must prioritize cost efficiency first.

Lastly, we can look into the number of respondent companies who also consider gender when developing their respective products or services. Around 48.28% or 14 companies out of 29 respondents said they assess the different impacts according to gender when producing goods. This may be seen as a positive or negative outcome, depending on the industry the respondent company is serving in. For instance, the “pink tax” in FMCG companies is a rising concern in today’s modern world [12]. It is where daily needs or health and hygiene products tend to cost more, simply as they are packaged differently for women. This is a common occurrence especially in FMCG companies as they tend to be the prime distributors of daily need products. The pink tax is a good example of when bringing gender into development may result in negative consideration and stereotype bias. On the other hand, there are also companies who are taking a public and active stance to demonstrate that gender and gender stereotypes do not matter and should be eliminated, when designing their products i.e. Pepsico’s campaign for women’s day promoting gender equality [13], where gender equality is promoted and this is a more positive stance.

Category	Question	Yes	Yes (%)	No	No (%)
Recruitment	Does your company have an approach towards ensuring gender-balanced interview panels during the hiring process?	14	48.28	15	51.72
	Does your company ensure that both women and men candidates are shortlisted for interviews?	18	62.07	11	37.93
	Does your company take proactive and effective steps to recruit women at all levels?	12	41.38	17	58.62
	Does your company take proactive and effective steps to recruit women in traditionally underrepresented roles?	9	31.03	20	68.97
	Does your company forbid inquiring about the status or plans of marriage, pregnancy or care responsibilities in job applications or during interview processes?	14	48.28	15	51.72

Table 3: Recruitment Frequency Analysis

Table 3 takes a closer look into the gender equality initiatives surrounding recruitment. The majority of companies ensure that both women and men are shortlisted for positions in interviews, with 18 out of 29 companies responding yes. Almost 50% of companies also continue to take proactive steps to recruit women across all levels, and ensure that interview panels have a balance in gender to avoid bias. A recurring complaint in the Bangladeshi job market have been instances where female candidates were asked personal and inappropriate questions inquiring about marriage, pregnancy and other personal commitments in order to understand if they are a good fit for the respective role. Almost 50% of survey respondents conveyed that they proactively avoid inappropriate questions, which indicates a positive step towards removing gender stereotypes in the interview process. In the initial 2010s job market, this scenario was a recurring problem when female candidates were not common in the Bangladeshi job market. However since development and the near closure of the education gap in recent years, this scenario continues to improve. Despite the basic progress, a large contrast can be seen concerning recruitment initiatives where companies continue to achieve the bare minimum, however do not take the next steps towards creating a progressive atmosphere.

A large difference can especially be seen in the study where 41.38% or 12 respondents state they proactively hire women at all levels, however simultaneously only 9 respondents or 31.03% of respondents proactively hire women in underrepresented roles.

This portrays a situation where women are considered however there may be underlying bias when it comes to the final stages of recruitment. Improvement in this sector must come by ensuring diverse panels to the end, and avoiding culture and performance attribution bias, where candidate performance is overestimated according to their gender [14].

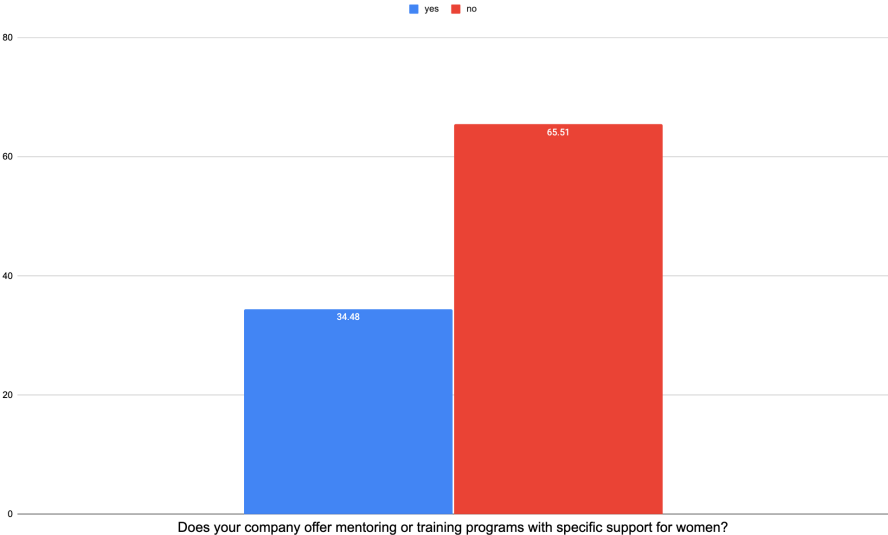


Figure 5: Support/Training Programs

According to Figure 5, more than 50% of respondent companies do not have mentoring or training programs in place in order to support female employees in the workplace. This is another problem area identified through the study, especially as survey respondents are in industries where female workers are on the heavier side. Training, moral support and workplace initiatives introduce a comfortable culture where employees feel comfortable enough to report

incidents and seek help from mechanisms in place. It also introduces the concept of gender equality into the workplace, creating a sense of foundation for employees with negative or stereotyped views on the subject matter.

By conducting more training and supporting women, companies will be able to enhance female employee skills and also normalize the process for male colleague counterparts, who will become used to working with their female colleagues. In the long run, training and workshops result in higher productivity for companies and larger output as a result. According to the primary data, professional development continues to remain a problem area that can also benefit from continuous improvement.

	Does your company report to their respective board on the overall ratio and ratio by employee level of basic salary and remuneration of women to men?	10	34.48	19	65.52
Compensation	Does your company have proactive procedures in place to remediate pay inequalities for employees?	10	34.48	19	65.52

Table 4: Compensation & Transparency

Transparency plays a large role in the step forwards towards gender equality. Unfortunately, with heavy corruption and side deals remaining prevalent in the country, transparency is a trait companies find it hard to excel at. According to an article by the World Bank, pay secrecy is one of the largest contributors to the compensation gender wage gap prevalent in developing countries such as Bangladesh [15]. In the data observed in Table 4, around 10 respondents out of 29 are transparent when it comes to compensation and equal compensation in the workplace. The survey inquires into transparency to the board, as well as mechanisms in place to remediate pay inequalities. Less than 40% of respondents maintain transparency, marking this as another sector where private businesses can improve their statistics in order to enhance employer-employee

relationships. In more developed countries around the world, legal laws state that remuneration ratios must be disclosed in public domains [15].

Steps similar to first world countries may assist the process of transparency for Bangladeshi companies, as it would allow the public to scrutinize companies for backward thinking and pay inequalities. By doing so, it would also enhance accountability for businesses and motivate them to encourage equal pay and as a larger result, bring Bangladesh closer to closing the gender wage gap in upcoming years.

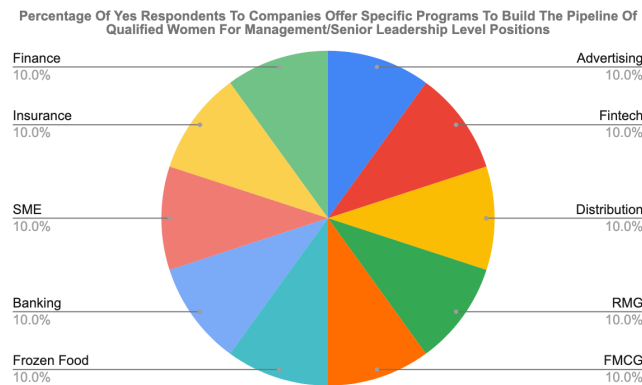


Figure 6: Professional Development By Sector

In Figure 6, we can observe the diversity of sectors where programs are built to assist women to achieve higher leadership positions. Such programs are increasingly rare in the private sector, with only 10 respondents out of 29 stating that they have pipeline programs in place in order to support female employees. An observation that can be made is larger businesses tend to have more growth availability. Larger companies also come with more progressive mindsets due to larger employee sizes in the workforce. From the study, we can note that more stable industries such as Insurance, Banking, Food, FMCG, RMG, Advertising and more are more likely to possess room for growth for women in the long run due to shifting mindsets. SMEs only make

up one out of ten respondents, and further improvement can be made in small businesses when it comes to female entrepreneurship as well as female position growth in the long term.

Partnerships	Does your company partner with organizations or other companies to improve gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives?	12	41.38	17	58.62
	Does your company participate in multi-stakeholder platforms promoting the rights of women and girls?	12	41.38	17	58.62
	Does your company consult with external stakeholders to understand the opportunities available to empower women and girls?	8	27.59	21	72.41

Table 5: Partnerships

According to the data seen in Table 5, only 12 out of 29 respondents partner with global organizations in order to promote gender equality. This is an incredibly missed opportunity, especially with recent intensive events and workshops by UN Women, the ILO, World Bank and more organizations in Bangladesh made to fit corporate businesses and help them enhance their diversity. The weakest area in terms of partnerships is where respondents are asked if they regularly consult with external stakeholders in order to empower women in the workplace. This area received a very low response rate from survey respondents, indicating that this is another problem area. Companies in Bangladesh would be able to conduct more knowledgeable training if in partnership with external, qualified stakeholders. External stakeholders allow a bias free environment with extensive knowledge on business equality processes. They are also able to share knowledge and expertise, with educated trainers who are able to mediate tough to crack situations. Experienced organizations and individuals will be able to mediate and troubleshoot complex problems employees feel they have in the workplace when it comes to gender equality. As a company's employee base expands, considering partnerships may result in large quantities of benefits in the long run.

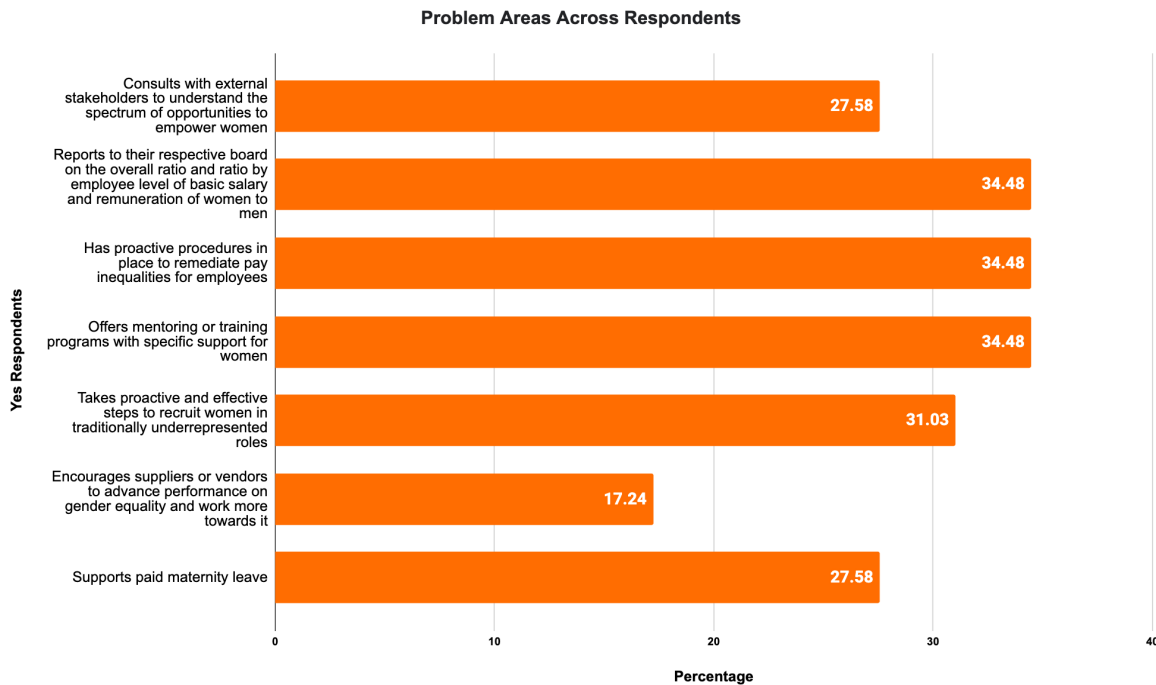


Figure 7: Problem Areas Across Respondents

In Figure 7, the graph displays and summarizes the lowest percentages observed across the study. The weakest area across all respondents was in the category of marketplace, where there was a severe lack of supplier and vendor encouragement from companies in terms of gender equality. Only 17.24% or 5 companies out of 29 companies responded yes, indicating that there is very limited supplier interaction in the business flow for most companies. The second largest problem area was in terms of maternity leave. This can be said to be the most serious problem area for companies, as maternity is a basic right that comes with the societal adaptations present in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, most female workers or employees are married and have families who are reliant on them to run the household.

In an environment such as this, support from employers is essential in order to maintain the work life balance overall, and also allows employees to balance their home lives with their sources of income.

Following the area of maternity leave closely, partnerships with external stakeholders is also a rare initiative undertaken by survey respondents, with only 27.58% of respondents consulting external organizations in order to better themselves and for the betterment of the environment. Other problem areas observed in the study include the lack of transparency, lack of procedures to mediate pay inequalities, and lack of diversified training. All of these areas are areas where private sector companies can improve, and must take steps in order to further the development and close the gap in the country. Without accountability and identification of weak areas, improvement will not be possible and development will remain stagnant in the long run.

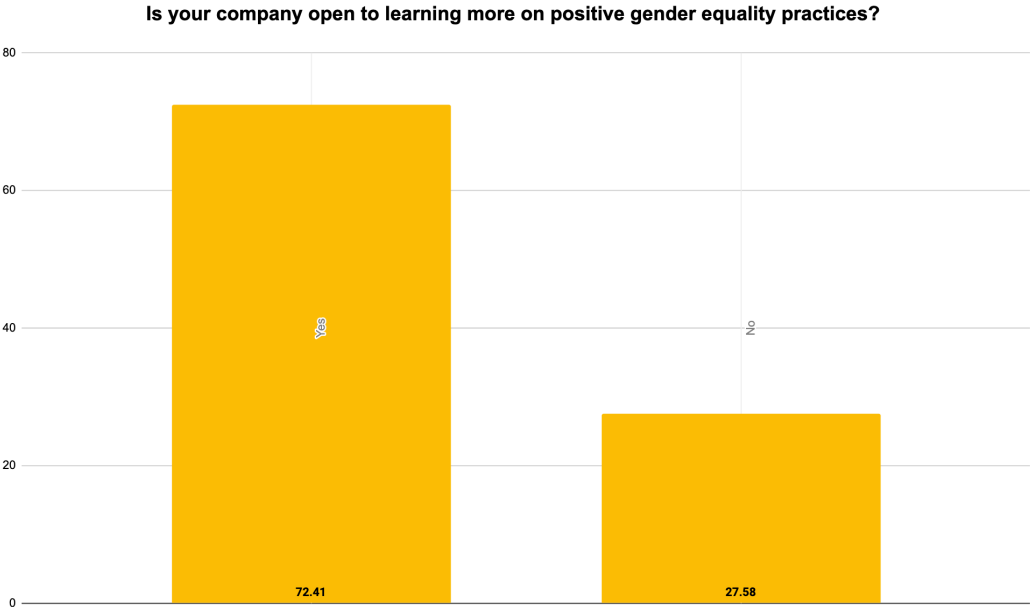


Figure 8: Open To Learning In The Future

In Figure 8, the data represents the number of companies who are open to learning more about gender equality in the future. It also signifies the percentage of respondents who are optimistic about the future and would like to work more towards development with the proper resources. According to the chart, 72.41% of companies would like to take on more initiatives in the future in order to become a fully equal opportunity employer, which is quite a large number of respondents from the survey. With more companies open to knowledge and skill building, Bangladesh will be able to work further towards closing the gap and creating more opportunities for women in the workforce.

Conclusion

Considering all of the categories of gender equality initiatives, private sector companies in Bangladesh are not at a weak position as of 2021. The study highlights the points of progress as well as problem areas that need more intensive work and continuous improvement. The goal of this research is to allow stakeholders from different companies to see the current standing and understand what is required in order to proceed with development and shifts in mindset. 29 companies made up of UN Global Compact Network Bangladesh member companies and private companies across different industries were observed in order to receive a good understanding of the stance of the private sector. As industries in Bangladesh continue to grow, a sample of 29 of the largest companies in the banking, insurance, FMCG, food, distribution, advertising and other industries represented a variety of sectors well throughout the study. As results of the study, several problem areas are identified for improvement in the future, including a need for transparency, professional development programs, stakeholder relationships and mechanisms for employees to mediate their problems and inequalities.

The study also identifies strong areas within businesses, including a low tolerance for violence and sexual harassment as well as multiple foundational equal opportunities in place in company codes of conduct.

Furthermore, the research investigates the progress businesses have made and proves the hypothesis to be true where severe improvement is required in gender stereotyping and maternity law implementation. Even though the study is composed of materials from the UN Global Compact Network Member Companies and private companies made up of the largest businesses in popular sectors, it still does not take all sectors fully into consideration and is only a representation of a small variety within many businesses present in Bangladesh. Ideally, researchers will note the findings as a part of larger studies when evaluating gender equality in Bangladesh. They will need to perform additional and in-depth, detailed research investigations into this area to receive a better understanding of progress made in terms of gender equality.

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire Given To Primary Respondents

Overview (Foundational)

1. Does your company have a policy that approaches and addresses hygiene and safety needs of women at work?
2. Does your company have a policy that ensures an environment free of violence and sexual harassment for women and men?
3. Does your company have an approach that ensures gender diversity in professional initiatives across the company?
4. Does your company have an approach that ensures men and women employees are compensated equally?
5. Does your company have a policy that ensures gender diversity in recruitment policies or processes?
6. Does your company have a policy that ensures support to parents and caregivers?
7. Does your company support paid maternity leave?
8. Does your company have an equal opportunity policy?
9. If your company possesses an equal opportunity policy, is the policy well communicated to all current and potential employees in the company?
10. Does your company provide training that focuses on non-discrimination and equal opportunity?
11. Does your company have an internal or external grievance and mechanism in place for conflict resolution relating to gender discrimination (confidential mechanism)?

Marketplace Overview

12. Does your company encourage suppliers and vendors to advance performance on gender equality and improve initiatives towards it?
13. Does your company have a policy that ensures an approach towards responsible marketing that considers the portrayal of gender stereotypes?
14. Does your company assess and consider the different impacts on women and men when developing products and/or services for the company?

Recruitment

15. Does your company have an approach towards ensuring gender-balanced interview panels during the hiring process?
16. Does your company ensure that both women and men candidates are shortlisted for interviews?
17. Does your company take proactive and effective steps to recruit women at all levels?
18. Does your company take proactive and effective steps to recruit women in traditionally underrepresented roles?
19. Does your company forbid inquiring about the status or plans of marriage, pregnancy or care responsibilities in job applications or during interview processes?

Professional Development

20. Does your company offer mentoring or training programs with specific support for women?
21. Does your company offer specific programs to build the pipeline of qualified women for management/ senior leadership level positions and assist them in working towards promotions?

Compensation

22. Does your company report to their respective board on the overall ratio and ratio by employee level of basic salary and remuneration of women to men?
23. Does your company have proactive procedures in place to remediate pay inequalities for employees?

Violence & Sexual Harassment

24. Does your company have a zero tolerance policy for all forms of violence to all employees, including sexual harassment, and engaging in acts of sexual exploitation of women and girls?

Partnerships

25. Does your company partner with organizations or other companies on gender equality and women's empowerment?
26. Does your company participate in multi-stakeholder platforms promoting the rights of women and girls?
27. Does your company consult with external stakeholders to understand the opportunities to empower women and girls?

Future

28. Is your company open to learning more on positive gender equality practices?