

**Session #3**

## HOW TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AMONG MANAGEMENT AND STAFF IN MFIS

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE e-MFP HR AG'S SURVEY AND VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Webinar on 25 October, 4pm CEST

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### BRIEF FOR e-MFP HR ACTION GROUP WEBINAR 3

October 25, 2022

Prepared by Cara S. Forster

#### SPEAKERS

**Dr. Susana Martinez Restrepo**, Executive Director, CoreWoman (Colombia / United States)

**Caitlin Scott**, Chief Strategy Officer, Friendship Bridge (United States)

**Victor Contreras**, Director of People Services, Friendship Bridge (Guatemala)

Moderator: **Cara S. Forster**, Director for LAC, SPTF (United States)

#### SUMMARY

The webinar began with **Dr. Susana Martinez Restrepo**, of CoreWoman explaining the methodology they use to identify barriers to gender equality in the companies they work with and how they generate a plan to address those barriers. The methodology examines three main aspects of the company and its employees:

- 1) Structural aspects – review of policies, protocols, and guidance – the written documentation from the institution.
- 2) Biases and behavior – The institutional culture is examined through a survey of the company’s employees – striving for >85% of the employees to respond to the survey and that the respondents are representative of both the different levels and departments in the company – with the responses disaggregated by gender and management level and checked for statistical significance.
- 3) Internal barriers – these include microaggressions, biases in tasks assigned to staff based on gender, and perceptions of the policies and practices at the institution etc.

After these three aspects have been researched, CoreWoman triangulates this data using the UN's WEP Tool to develop a list of the barriers to gender equality in the institution. To help address the barriers identified, CoreWoman also supports the institution through the following steps:

- a. Co-creates an action plan to address these barriers,
- b. Establishes the priority actions,
- c. Helps the institution implement its priority actions, and
- d. Creates a list of lessons learned.

Establishing which barriers to address first is a strategic choice that requires professional judgement and collaboration with the institution. CoreWoman uses three criteria to select the best candidates for intervention among the gaps/barriers identified. The criteria used include:

- the level of impact that addressing this barrier will create,
- how viable the solution is likely to be in the short term, and
- the feasibility of implementation given the resources available.
- Dr. Martinez Restrepo shared the following recommendations with the participants who want to improve gender inclusion in their financial institutions:
  - Measure everything
  - Use a systems approach to evaluating the current state of practice
  - Take action at all levels in the organization
  - You can't solve everything with training – make sure to go deeper.

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD: FRIENDSHIP BRIDGE

- Friendship Bridge (FB) is a Guatemalan non-profit that serves 25,000 female clients, many of whom are indigenous Mayan women living in rural areas with very limited access to education and infrastructure. FB is committed to measurement and learning from the analysis of the data it collects on clients and staff to create an organization that embodies its values of resilience, empowerment, and business development for the women of Guatemala.
- Gender barriers are significant in Guatemala. The World Economic Forum ranks Guatemala as the country in Latin America that is lowest in terms of gender equality. Their data showed that 28% of all Guatemalan women have no form of income at all.
- Friendship Bridge has prioritized gender equality because of its values and has systematically removed barriers to inclusion and implemented policies and practices that promote representation of women at all levels of the institution. The MFI has seen positive financial results due to the implementation of these practices. For example, their data shows that female staff are more effective in serving their female clients, matching the productivity of their male counterparts and in some cases exceeding it. Therefore, achieving gender equality by attaining 50/50 male/female field staff has allowed for increased productivity overall. Staff retention has been improving for the last 8 years in a row and now stands at 82%, creating a stable and loyal workforce.
- There are several practical steps Friendship Bridge has taken to create a work environment that is favorable to women. Some of these include:
  - Creation of a values driven culture:
    - Include values in performance evaluations
    - Ensure equal representation of women in staff, management, and the board

- Small monetary prizes for staff that are praised by colleagues for demonstrating values in action
  - Give staff days off to celebrate Women's Day and Mother's Day with family
- Encouraging open communication between staff and management and within teams
- Inclusion of gender equality in policies
- Gender equality is promoted in recruiting by giving female candidates an extra 5 points in the matrix that evaluates candidates' attributes/suitability for the role they are seeking
- Application of consequences for staff that break the rules with regards to respect and appropriate behavior
- FB works with female youth in rural communities to create confidence and improve access to education to promote the ability of women to join the work force later
- Provision of access to driving lessons and motorcycle loans to support female loan officers
- Annual research on competitive salaries. Measure and report annually on gender representation at all levels of staff
- Maternity leave and health insurance benefits in excess of what is required by law
- Provision of 3 days additional PTO to manage family situations and help create work-life balance
- Gender sensitivity training for staff

## RESOURCES

1. Webpage for the e-MFP's HR Action Group with links to the materials from all the webinars in this series: [Human Resources Action Group | e-MFP](#)
2. Publication: [HRD practices in the microfinance sector](#)
3. Universal Standards for Social and Environmental Performance: <https://cerise-sptf.org/download-the-manual/> Dimension 5 describes the practices necessary for Responsible Human Resources Management
4. CoreWoman: <https://www.corewoman.org/en/fortalecimiento>
5. Friendship Bridge: <https://www.friendshipbridge.org/>