

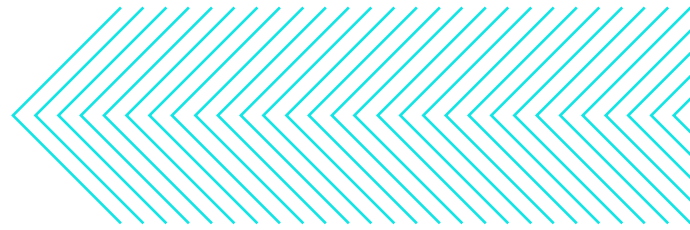
Diverse Voices, Sustainable Futures: Ensuring Equity in the Workplace

On 5 October 2023,

NAMA Women Advancement and Dubai Sustainable Finance Working Group

co-organised a workshop examining the impact of gender diversity on business performance and sustainability. The workshop titled "Diverse Voices, Sustainable Futures: Ensuring Equity in the Workplace" took place on the sideline of the Future Sustainability Forum with the view to engage professionals working in the corporate sustainability field in a discussion around integrating gender across all pillars of the ESG framework. The workshop addressed industry-specific challenges for promoting gender inclusive practices at work and encouraged businesses to take a holistic approach to gender equality in the context of ESG.

The workshop involved a scenario exercise prompting participants to reflect on the most common challenges for advancing diversity and inclusion in today's corporate world and to come up with concrete action points and practical solutions to drive change.



**This report summarises
the key takeaways from the discussion:**

1 Integrating gender into the ESG framework:

While there is an increasing focus on the “Social” aspect of “ESG,” it is important to consider how gender can be integrated across all pillars of the ESG framework, since it affects environmental resilience, drives social inclusion, and reinforces ethical governance practices. Companies that prioritise gender equality not only contribute to a more just and equitable society but also enhance their ESG performance, ultimately leading to sustainable and long-term success.





The discussion drew on concrete examples for mainstreaming gender into the components of ESG. In particular, when it comes to “Environment,” businesses need to be mindful of the impact on gender when designing and implementing corporate climate policies, assessing energy use, managing waste, and tackling pollution. Another way to promote the integration of gender in the environment pillar is by supporting women affected by climate change and environment degradation through targeted CSR initiatives and other community projects.



Regarding the “Social” pillar, it was highlighted how companies are increasingly looking inward to promote the well-being of employees and advance diversity and inclusion within the workplace. At the same time, it was acknowledged that businesses can do more in terms of managing relationships with external stakeholders in a way that is gender-sensitive. For example, some companies are now requiring diversity in the supply chain, including support for women owned businesses when selecting vendors.



In the “Governance” space, investors are increasingly demanding a better representation of women on corporate boards and executive ranks to ensure diversity of thought and responsible corporate management.

2 The role of inclusive leadership in driving change within the organisation:

Leaders set the tone and direction for the team. While the existence of policies and procedures is an important first step in advancing D&I in an organisation, but it is ultimately the behavior of leaders that has the biggest influence on achieving tangible

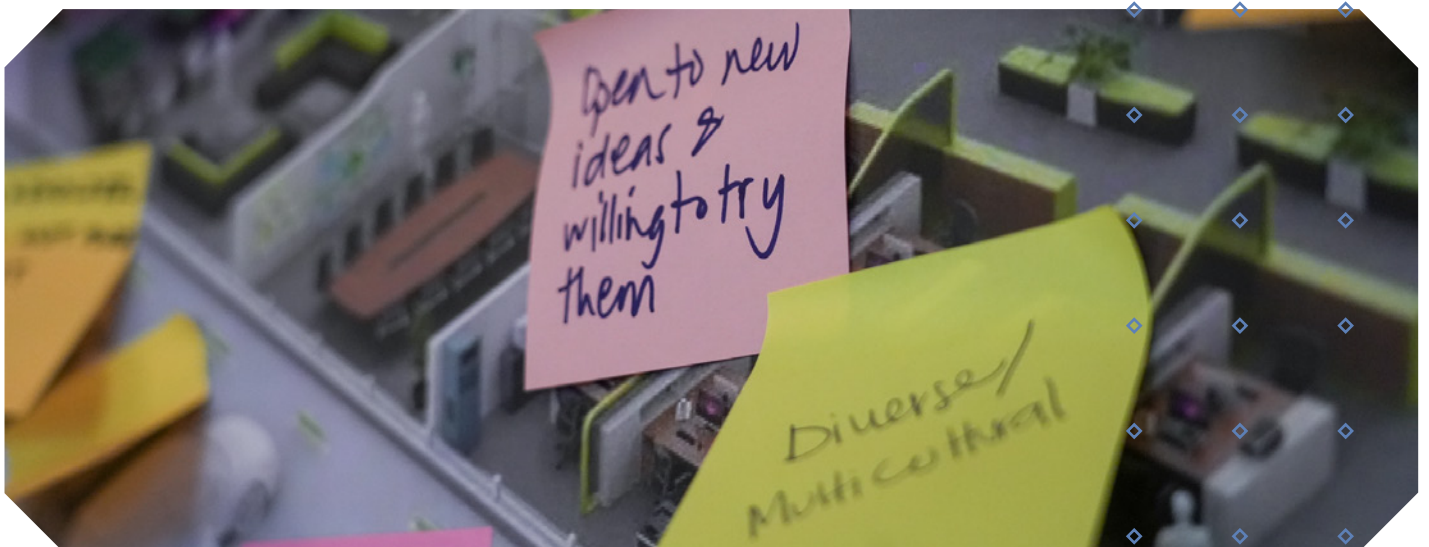
outcomes. Modeling pro-active and inclusive behavior is key and can have a trickle-down effect in the organisation. In this regard, participants mentioned the importance of mentoring and reverse mentoring in creating a culture of open and honest communication.



3 Promoting inter-generational communication to support an inclusive work environment.

Generation Z brings new skills, innovative ideas and a fresh perspective to the workplace - but they also present a different set of challenges to businesses. According to recent surveys, the majority of Gen Z employees value work-life balance and mental health over salary and job security. Participants acknowledged that there is often a mismatch in expectations between what companies offer nowadays and what Gen Z

is striving to achieve. That is why, understanding the needs of Gen Z and promoting inter-generational dialogue within a company is crucial to create a truly diverse and inclusive workplace. It is expected that by 2025, Gen Z will account for more than a quarter of the workforce – which suggests that a shift in companies’ strategies and operations is necessary.



4 Ensuring diversity in leadership positions.

This remains a controversial issue in today's corporate world, even though many companies acknowledge the value and benefit of having more women representation in leadership and executive positions. Companies are often quick to set targets to improve the number of women in senior leadership roles, without a clear direction on how this target will be achieved and how it ties in with the company's overarching diversity and inclusion policy. As

a result, we often see the phenomenon of women being "parachuted" into a company just to meet targets – which ends up being quite damaging to the overall success of D&I efforts. Companies that are committed to improving diversity in leadership positions in a sustainable manner need to support the women in the organisation and equip them with the right skills and experience. This can be facilitated through mentorship and sponsorship programs.

Furthermore, drawing from the scenario exercise, participants reflected on some of the most prevalent challenges for advancing gender inclusive practices in the UAE private sector. These include:



- 1 Resistance to change from middle and senior management;
- 2 Unrealistic expectations and goal setting, especially when it comes to increasing women representation in technical and senior roles;
- 3 Fragmented efforts to advance gender equality;
- 4 Leadership not "walking the talk;"
- 5 Unconscious bias;
- 6 Lack of expertise and knowledge to implement diversity and inclusion strategies;
- 7 Not engaging men as allies.

Participants were invited to work in groups and come up with practical solutions for the following three challenges:

1 Resistance to change from middle and senior management

This is one of the most difficult and complex aspects of the D&I journey – change is sometimes met with resistance. Participants noted that resistance often comes from middle management, which creates bottleneck when pushing for concrete results. That is why, involving middle management in discussions and trainings around gender is important. At the same time, since changing mindsets is

a long-term process, an easier and more effective approach is to develop a scheme of accountability and reward for management (e.g. make D&I goals directly linked to KPIs). Participants also touched on small changes within the organisation that can make a big impact, including for example putting up banners in the office displaying the company values and commitment to diversity.



2 Addressing unconscious bias.

Participants highlighted the need to increase awareness and education on unconscious bias and micro aggressions that exist within the workplace. It was mentioned that more and more organisations are taking serious steps to overcome biases in the recruitment process, but it biases are quite prevalent in

day-to-day interactions between employees and across different functions. Reducing unconscious bias requires behavior change and continuous learning. At the same time, employees should be empowered and encouraged to respond to biases.



3 Engaging men as allies.

Participants agreed that when men are actively involved in the discussion and in advocating for gender equality, it can help break down stereotypes, reduce resistance, and create a more inclusive workplace culture. Men can play a pivotal role in challenging existing biases and promoting equal opportunities for women in leadership roles.

Some of the ways to increase the engagement of men as allies are through sponsorship and mentoring programs, instilling a culture of open and honest communication, effective peer-to-peer feedback, facilitating social engagements to have a more cohesive relationship.



Participants agreed that addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that involves all functions and levels within the organisation. Successful gender diversity and inclusion initiatives require buy-in from leadership, active engagement from employees, and having the right policies/structures in place. Additionally, organisations need to regularly assess their progress, adapt strategies as needed, and continuously promote gender equality as an integral part of their corporate culture and sustainability efforts.