

Scaling Frontier Innovation Gender Strategy:

Using a gender lens to drive innovation through social entrepreneurship in Asia-Pacific

Scaling Frontier Innovation (SFI) is an experimental program focused on advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through innovation led by social entrepreneurship across Asia-Pacific. The program is made up of four components; Frontier Innovators, Frontier Incubators, Frontier Brokers and Frontier Capital.

Each of these parts works to drive innovation through approaches that also improve women's economic empowerment. We ground our work in context, check our assumptions, and address privilege and bias. We analyse the gender and power dynamics throughout the program in order to get to a more inclusive approach that will lead to sustained, equitable development impact.

We share our approach so far, some questions we found helpful to get us started, and our intentions moving forward. We hope you will join us on this learning journey.

What is a gender lens and why should it drive approaches to innovation?

A gender lens, or gender analysis, is a study of how power, privilege and bias effect people of different genders within their context. This is about understanding their home, social, and work life but also looking at how power, privilege and bias operate systemically. Privilege and bias are baked into our institutions, laws, and structures - and this allows for the advantage or disadvantage of some over others across a society or culture. And, a gender lens should never separate the experience of gender from their ethnicity, class or caste, religion, ability or other factors, that can compound advantage or oppression.

A gender lens can and should drive innovation and entrepreneurial approaches. Any part of the entrepreneurial journey has the potential to introduce biases that privilege some ideas, people and approaches over others. Privilege and bias shape the methods through which a set of entrepreneurs develop, validate and scale innovative ideas. Privilege and bias inform assumptions about the support made available to entrepreneurs to implement their ideas and grow their business.

To address these power dynamics, we apply the principles of a gender analysis to our work in SFI: we ground our work in context, check our assumptions on where we place value, address any bias and harmful power dynamics in our practices and processes in support of entrepreneurship. By creating and prioritising inclusive approaches, we aim to ensure we have thriving ecosystems across Asia-Pacific where all stand to benefit from the outcomes of innovation and entrepreneurship.

We do this through a few good practices and some important questions.

The first step is to ground innovation in context.

To understand how power, privilege and bias operate in a specific context, a gender lens invites us to recognise and value the knowledge, expertise and experience of those who know the context best. People grounded in a context are more likely to understand the nuances of how power operates in their

environment. They will be able to design or to inform solutions that shift rather than reinforce inequities.

SFI is building a platform that celebrates a diversity of ideas and perspectives and will prioritise the voices of those who can analyse power and gender in context.

For example, during the Frontier Brokers co-creation workshop in October 2018, over the course of the days, through the design and facilitation of the conversations, those who actively worked in the region and had the ability to do a gender lens in context, their voices got louder. Those who did not understand the context had to learn to rely on those who did. That shifted the power in the room. Shifting power in a single room can start to shift power in the ecosystem.

As part of our practice we ask questions about context:

- Where is the solution from? Who is represented in the team? Are they grounded in the context? Do they represent a range of experiences?
- Whose voice matters in decision-making? What are the power dynamics in how the team operates and whose opinion is privileged? Are there voices that are missing or not heard in the conversation? What would need to change to shift these dynamics?
- Who is left out? Whose experience is not seen or understood.

Then, we check assumptions about what ideas and approaches are valued

Value, like bias, is subjective. In our work, we all have biases. What matters is how we check any assumptions about where we place value, what we hold as important or desirable. A gender lens invites us to understand our biases, to question assumptions.

For example, there are biases in our notions about what “scale” and “sustainability” look like and what type of capital is needed to get an enterprise there. In the first SFI program, Frontier Innovators, we encouraged innovators to go after investment, often equity investment, to scale the impact of their work and to drive towards sustainability of their enterprise. As the program rolled out, we saw the biases in pushing entrepreneurs toward equity. The entrepreneurs who receive equity investments (predominately men from privileged backgrounds) are named the models of success. In the end, though, equity is a limited tool and useful for only a small number of businesses. We need to be open to discover an appropriate growth pathway for a business, rather than push them into a privileged model.

Frontier Innovators reinforced our understanding that there is no one solution suited to all corners of the Asia-Pacific region, and our commitment to check assumptions, addressing how bias and privilege shape what we value.

As part of our practice we question our assumptions:

- What are your assumptions about a “good business?” What is your image of that business? Are there privileges or biases at work in these assumptions?
- What growth is appropriate for the context that the enterprise is in? Why is growth wanted or needed at this time? Are there assumptions at play?
- What is the appropriate financing? Who are the right partners?

Finally, we examine the power dynamics in our structures and processes

Entrepreneurship ecosystems, like any system, are defined by a set of power dynamics. A gender lens invites us to see, understand, and shift the power dynamics in any interaction, whether between individuals or embedded in the system. This means naming and addressing the power dynamics implicit in the process of supporting entrepreneurs – ensuring that any technical assistance and funding, provided to and by incubators, accelerators, mentors, networks and investors contend with power, privilege and bias.

An example, for the November 2018 Frontier Incubators workshop, we shifted the agenda of the workshop to value the experience and expertise of incubators and accelerators within our region, ensuring our Asia-Pacific partners were seen not solely as recipients of support services, but as actors with years of experience and expertise in their own environment. This change meant the line between teacher and learner was much more blurred, making for more engaged learning.

SFI has started addressing power dynamics between SFI and applicants, implementing partners, and other investors involved in our program.

As part of our practices, we shape power dynamics:

- What would change if the actors in the system named the power dynamics at play? Has DFAT as the donor named their own power?
- Who is named as the expert? How does that affect who has power?
- What would shift if the partners or the roles of the partners shifted? How might we change how we network, who we partner with, and how and where resources are allocated?
- How are relationships structured and what are the governance models? How will this ensure questions of power, privilege and bias are addressed?

SFI commitments moving forward

In addition to offering a way in which to consider power, privilege and bias, a gender lens invites us to continuously question. Therefore, we invite you to use the principles of gender analysis to continuously reflect on how your work can address the most pressing challenges of our time, and what collective action we may wish to take to realise a prosperous and just future for all.

SFI has begun the journey of bringing a gender lens into the program as we implement. This has already shifted the approach, perception and practice of the program. Going forward, SFI is committed to practicing the following:

- Recognise and value voices, ideas and perspectives from the Asia-Pacific context.
- Include and call attention to varied and diverse perspectives in our work.
- Pay explicit attention to power dynamics in our work and call out these dynamics publicly.

We are proud of the progress we have made within the SFI family, knowing we still have a long way to go. Our team is practicing using a gender lens as we implement the initiative. We are thinking about the power dynamics at play within SFI and our ecosystem, aiming to challenge our assumptions, all the while valuing voices, perspectives, and experiences grounded in Asia-Pacific.

Under our experimental mandate, SFI will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible in using a gender lens to drive social entrepreneurship that is innovative, inclusive, equitable and just. We hope

others in and outside DFAT will follow our example, determining how funders like us design and implement programs that recognise and value local expertise, check our assumptions and address questions of power in our work.

We look forward to walking this journey with you.

Definitions & concepts

We offer a set of definitions to help clarify the terms used in the strategy. These definitions are heavily borrowed and adapted from various sources referenced below. We encourage readers to review these great resources and consider how you may be able to support their efforts.

Bias:	A subjective opinion, predisposition, preference, prejudice, generalization or inclination, often based on stereotypes.
Context:	The interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs; the environment or setting in question.
Gender:	Cultural or societal expectations and stereotypes that dictate appropriate roles, behaviours, and actions associated with a particular gender. Across the world, many people still hold that there are only two genders – men and women. This gender binary, the idea of only two genders is based on sex assigned at birth. While sex is biological, gender is socially constructed; gender is not the same as sex. All over the world, for centuries, many societies and cultures have recognized more than two genders. The Bugi in Indonesia, for example, recognize five genders. How a person’s gender is perceived often influences how others perceive and treat them and informs a person’s status in society. The social norms, and the power dynamics related to gender vary by place and change over time.
Gender identity:	The gender by which any person identifies; it is a person’s internal and individual determination of their gender based on their feeling of being a man, a woman, both, neither, or somewhere else along the gender spectrum in a cultural context. A person’s gender may not match their assigned sex at birth. A person’s gender identity should not be confused with their sexual orientation; these concepts are fundamentally different and independent from one another.
Gender equality:	The practice of ensuring equal treatment of all people, no matter their gender. It refers to the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities. Equality between genders is seen as both a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable, people-centered development. Equality does not equate with sameness.
Gender lens:	A rigorous discipline with the goal of seeing and understanding how power, privilege and bias operate in a specific context, ideally with attention to how power might be disrupted.

A gender lens analyses the relationship between different gendered groups in society, their access to resources, opportunities, and the constraints they face relative to each other. Done with a view to intersectionality, a gender lens is important in understanding the different patterns of involvement, behaviour and activities that different groups have in economic, social and legal structures. A gender lens requires us to move beyond thinking just about women, and as women as a single group, to applying a gender analysis to systems, process, and structures of power. This includes how we invest – from how we assign value opportunities, risks, structures, processes and expertise.

Gender norms:	The gender binary (male-female) influences what societies and cultures consider “normal” or acceptable. These relate to the behaviours, dress, appearance and roles for women and men. Gender norms continue to dictate that anyone variant from what is deemed acceptable will experience discrimination and oppression at an individual and systemic level. Gender norms can contribute to power imbalances and gender inequality in the home, workplace, markets and in society as a whole
Inclusive innovation:	Implementable ideas that challenge and aim to better the status quo, especially for equity-seeking groups.
Intersectionality:	A framework for understanding and identifying interconnected facets of our lives that compound or exacerbate our experiences of privilege or oppression (i.e. gender, race, class, religion, ability). Intersectionality is the idea that, for instance, racism cannot be separated from gender discrimination.
Oppression:	Unjust or cruel exercise of power. Usually entails the subordination of one group (or person) to another. Systems oppression recognises that our societies and cultures have been built on the oppression of certain groups over others. Oppression is thus baked into not only our behaviours, but our institutions and systems.
Power:	The possession of control, authority, or influence over others, often associated with privilege
Privilege:	A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.