



Sistema.bio

GENDER IMPACT REPORT

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Introduction

Sistema.bio is a social enterprise that promotes a world where waste is a resource and farmers are empowered and productive. Headquartered in Mexico City and operating in Latin America, India, and Africa, Sistema.bio brings technology, training, and financing to farmers. Specifically, the company manufactures, sells, installs, and finances patented biodigester systems, for small and medium-scale farmers to convert their waste into renewable biogas and organic fertilizer, as well as biogas appliances and connections.

As an organization focused on innovation and impact, Sistema.bio has inherently operated with an eye to gender inclusion, impacting women as farmers and end-users of its biogas digesters as well as women in its workforce. In recent years, however, Sistema.bio has increased its strategic efforts to recruit, hire, retain, and advance women within the company, both in leadership and the workforce, becoming an industry leader in the area of gender inclusion. This report details the advances Sistema.bio has made with these efforts and the impact on Sistema.bio's operating practices.

In its work to further gender efforts internally, Sistema.bio partnered with Value for Women (VfW), a specialized advisory firm helping organizations advance gender inclusion. Believing that women are key drivers of economic and social growth and that women's inclusion is essential for better business outcomes, VfW takes a "business first" approach to gender inclusion. This entails identifying and testing new solutions that foster inclusion while unlocking the powerful economic potential that women hold.

This report looks to provide an overview of the gender pilots implemented, lessons learned, and subsequent actions taken to increase gender inclusion at Sistema.bio, highlight success stories, and bring the reader up to date on Sistema.bio's current position on gender inclusion.



■ Gender Pilots

At the outset of Sistema.bio's strategic gender inclusion initiatives, in 2018, Sistema.bio and Value for Women sought to determine how best to apply a gender lens to improve business outcomes for the company. They did this through two pilots. The first pilot tested gender-specific marketing messaging in Mexico and Kenya. The second pilot tested methods of improving sales staff's performance in Kenya.

Pilot 1: Gender-Specific Marketing

In March 2018, Value for Women and Sistema.bio partnered to carry out a pilot project supported by the Shell Foundation, as part of the Shell Foundation's support to develop and test the impact of gender-specific business strategies on clean energy SMEs. Sistema.bio was selected through a competitive process, whereby it received pilot design, implementation, and technical assistance (TA) support from VfW. The aim of Sistema.bio's pilot was to better understand gender differences between prospective customers in both new and existing markets, and to use that understanding to tailor marketing messaging to reach men and women customers more efficiently and effectively. Focus groups and interviews identified that both men and women saw cost savings as a benefit of Sistema.bio's system. However, men and women saw different benefits accruing from those savings. These insights informed gender-specific marketing messaging.

In Kenya, while no change in sales could be attributed directly to the gender-specific messaging, attendees at meetings where gender-specific messaging was used showed **an increased awareness of the Sistema.bio brand** and one influential woman community member bought a biodigester, which could then potentially be used to demonstrate its benefits to other community members.

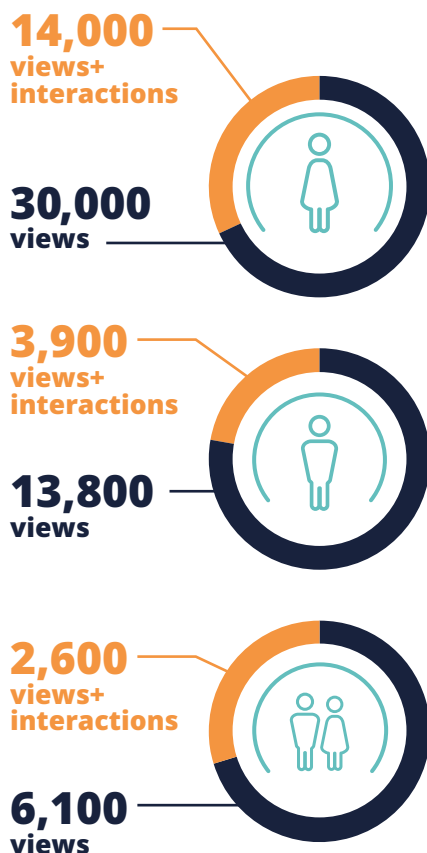
In Mexico, gender-specific messaging was delivered in a Facebook campaign to women-only, men-only, and mixed-gender groups. The gender-specific messaging proved to not only be very effective, but also to be uniquely effective, in reaching women. Across the different groups, more women in women-only Facebook groups both viewed and interacted with the messaging than did men or mixed group members (*Please see Graphic 1*).



Graphic 1. Effectiveness of gender-specific Facebook messaging in Mexico

■ Viewed post

■ Viewed and interacted with post



Pilot 2: Using Sex-Disaggregated Data to Increase Sales

In 2019, with support from the AlphaMundi Foundation, Value for Women and Sistema.bio used sex-disaggregated data to design and test interventions to increase sales in Kenya.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected on Sistema.bio's sales agent processes and performance, broken down by sex. Analysis of this data showed that women sales agents were facing several gender-specific challenges, including:

- **seeing fewer customers per day**, as compared to male peers, possibly due to transport challenges faced by women sales agents;
- **using fewer cost calculations in their sales pitches**, as compared to male peers, suggesting a lower level of comfort with the financial savings aspects of biodigesters.

However, it was also found that **women agents closed sales more rapidly and with fewer follow-up customer engagements than men**, speaking to the efficiency with which women agents work once they are able to reach customers.



Based on this data, Sistema.bio first piloted giving salespeople of both genders additional financial support for transport. **During the first month of increased transport stipends, sales increased across men and women sales agents;** however, sales decreased in every subsequent month of the trial. VfW and Sistema.bio identified that additional factors were likely contributors to this trend, including the implementation of a price promotion that coincided with the first month of the increased stipend, and the latter months of the trial including the period of the year when farmers have additional costs. Effectively, there were too many confounding factors to determine if the pilot was successful.

Secondly, Sistema.bio trained sales agents on sales best practices. This included both office training and field

coaching on scalable sales conversations, listening, and building trust, focusing on customer pain points, and leveraging existing customer networks. The results were similar to those of the transport stipend intervention: **sales initially increased across both men and women sales agents,** but decreased in every subsequent month of the trial. This may be due to a coinciding shift in the sales team compensation structure or due to the seasonal factors mentioned above. Like in the previous pilot, these confounding factors hindered determining if the pilot was successful. However it is important to note that **women sales agents participating in this pilot sold more biodigesters than their male counterparts:** 1.5 biodigesters per month were sold on average by women, compared to 1.3 biodigesters sold per month by men.



Learnings and Carrying This Work Forward

Sistema.bio's time investment in these various pilots led to key learnings for the company and these learnings continue to influence both internal operations and customer engagement practices.

The marketing pilots provided Sistema.bio with new customer insights in both the Mexico and Kenya markets, including insights into the personae of women heads of households who potentially make purchasing decisions for the home. One particular insight, on how in both Mexico and Kenya women and men in a household will often make joint purchasing decisions, was incorporated into gender training on "Women as Customers" that was given to sales staff (Please see Case Study 1 below).

The sales pilots in Kenya indicated that women agents outperformed male peers in key areas influencing sales performance, including faster adoption of methods taught during sales training, visible improvement in

sales performance after one-on-one field coaching, greater efficiency in pre and post-sale customer engagement, and better engagement with women customers. One reason for this enhanced engagement may be women sales agents' direct knowledge and ability to empathize with the domestic responsibilities of women customers, who are most often the end users of Sistema.bio's biodigester.

Interviews with Regional and Area Sales Managers in 2021 indicate that various **practices from the pilot interventions were continued, to the benefit of women in Sistema.bio**. For example, female sales agents in Kenya stated that they feel their **transport cost needs are now supported** by the company. Furthermore, in the Kenya office, **women in sales have had the opportunity to attend new trainings, both to improve their sales skills and**, in the case of Area and Regional Sales Managers, **their leadership**.



Area Sales Manager Sophia Karwitha, right, with Sistema.bio team members and customers

Case Study 1

Women as customers

In August 2020, Sistema.bio conducted a gender training for sales agents in Kenya. This training was led by Mary Muthoni, a Regional Sales Manager (and biodigester customer) and Bell Okello, an external gender and agriculture expert. The training focused on connecting with women as customers and specifically around how Sistema.bio's product could solve their challenges.

Sistema.bio has long recognized that women are the most frequent users of biodigesters within their households. Not only are women most often the household member responsible for operating the biodigester, but women use the fuel for cooking. Therefore, Sistema.bio recognized that sales and marketing messages needed to be

tailored to each gender. Says Sales and Training Manager Jessica Carey, "We need to be able to connect with women in the homestead because they are the ones who experience the most challenges with cooking when it comes to smoke, and the burden of labor that comes along with it."

Furthermore, based on a Sistema.bio/ Value for Women Kenya marketing pilot insight that household members needed to consult with their spouses before buying biodigesters, the training emphasized how this joint decision making that often occurs in households necessitated men's buy-in as well. This buy-in could be gained by appealing to men around how the products would benefit their wives, sisters, and daughters in the ways mentioned previously.



“[The pilots] helped us frame the conversation moving forward.”

– Alex Eaton, CEO

Subsequent Steps

The gender pilots with Value for Women, Shell Foundation, and AlphaMundi catalyzed further inclusion efforts within Sistema.bio. The Sistema.bio team began to think more intentionally and strategically about gender and took steps to improve the gender balance among staff, primarily through its human resources practices around recruiting, hiring, professional development, and advancement opportunities.

Recruiting and Hiring

In Kenya, Sistema.bio already had a high percentage of women in leadership roles at the beginning of 2019, however it had only 38% of women on its sales staff and no female technicians. The company has since **actively sought to achieve gender balance in its Kenya office**, working to recruit and hire more women in its sales and technical departments. Actions it took to do so included:

- Having women speaking at recruiting events;
- Depicting women in recruiting and marketing materials such as flyers, posters, and brochures;
- Using gender-neutral pronouns and language in its job descriptions; and
- Advertising generous family leave policies and lactation rooms among its benefits.

These actions to hire more women employees have shown results. In Kenya, **Sistema.bio has increased the percentage of women in its salesforce by 9%** (up to 47% today, including three women Area Sales Managers and one Regional Sales Manager) **and on its technical team by 5%** (including one Technician, one Senior Technician, and one Technical Operations Manager — East Africa). The Kenya-based finance and administration team is now 50% women and the leadership team continues to be majority women (75% women today). Looking forward, the company plans to continue recruiting women into both sales and technical roles, given the success of its women recruits into those roles to date.



“I have grown from Assistant Technician to Technician, and had the opportunity to travel to Southern Sudan to do the installation there. It’s so amazing. Going to a different country to do an installation is something I couldn’t have imagined, but Sistema gave me the opportunity to do that, and it was a success.”

– Veronica Cherono, Technician

“In terms of support from my fellow managers, the CEO, and the global team, it’s been immense. Sistema is one of the places which values the input that women have.”

– Madrin Maina, Technical Operations Manager

Providing Ongoing Support

Sistema.bio also now makes a concerted effort to encourage women employees to access professional development and advancement opportunities and **has provided continuous support to the professional development of high-performing women in the organization in Kenya.** In key informant interviews, women employees noted that they had the opportunity to attend trainings both on “hard skills”, such as sales and technical aspects, and on “soft skills”, such as leadership. Women employees at Sistema.bio praised the company for giving them these professional development opportunities.

Gender Inclusion at Sistema.bio Today

Sistema.bio’s efforts for gender equality in the workforce have borne fruit, as detailed below.

Women in the Workforce Feel Supported

Women staff at Sistema.bio report feeling that Sistema.bio is a supportive working environment where they can bring concerns to management and have those concerns heard and responded to.

Creating New Gender Norms

Sistema.bio’s work in hiring women into field-based roles in Kenya has defied gender stereotypes, showing both colleagues and customers that women are just as capable of doing sales and technical jobs as men. According to Regional Technical Coordinator Vincent Otieno, installations done by female technicians have very few post-installation technical issues, leading to increased customer satisfaction.





“We also have 2 ladies who work as technicians. They do an amazing job, even better than some male technicians. They have proven to us that ladies can make as good technicians as their male counterparts. They have also opened the door for ladies to be considered equally as men when recruiting new members for the technical team. I have also seen clients getting excited when they see lady technicians. Some clients go the extra mile of connecting us with new clients because of that.”

– Peter Mbatia, Regional
Technical Coordinator

Advancement Opportunities Are Tangible

Several women in field leadership roles at Sistema.bio in Kenya have advanced through the ranks at the company. The women in Regional Sales Manager and Area Sales Manager positions all started their careers as Sales Agents, and its women Technician and Senior Technician began their careers at Sistema.bio as Assistant Technicians. By providing training, professional development, and advancement opportunities to women employees, Sistema.bio promotes gender equality within its organization.

Virtuous Cycle of Women’s Advancement

Not only are women staff advancing, but **Kenya-based women employees are eager to recruit and hire more women** with high potential, creating a virtuous circle of women’s advancement within the organization.



Case Study 2

■ Emmy Soi, Senior Technician

Emmy Soi was hired as an Assistant Technician at Sistema.bio in 2019. She was soon promoted to Technician, and recently to Senior Technician. In her career at Sistema.bio, she has felt supported by her colleagues, but has dealt with customers questioning her ability to do technical work as a woman. To counter that mentality, she says, “In a rural society, where technical jobs have been dominated by men, it is almost natural that our clients will be skeptical of our ability to do a proper installation. Upon completing the installation, the client still seemed to doubt if she would ever get gas. But after two weeks, she started cooking and would call us with a lot of excitement and appreciation for the opportunity the company has given to women.”

Madrin Maina, Technical Operations Manager — East Africa, highlighted Emmy’s technical and leadership skills, saying, “Emmy is an excellent technician who does her work well and consistently asks to be assigned more responsibilities. Recently, she was promoted to Senior Technician and has even taken up desk responsibilities where she assists her direct line manager in work planning for her fellow team members. She is also good at giving feedback, which is important for growth and work improvement.”

Emmy has enjoyed the opportunity to advance her career at Sistema.bio, and plans to continue her career growth there. Says Emmy, “Giving us the opportunity to climb that ladder has really made me great. I’m proud of Sistema.bio. It’s a place where you can grow.”



Case Study 3

■ Mary Muthoni, Regional Sales Manager

Sistema.bio hired Mary Muthoni (center, with customers) in 2018 as the first Sales Agent in Kenya's Meru region. A year later, she had recruited a team of 10 Sales Agents — seven women and three men — and was promoted to Area Sales Manager. Then in 2020, Mary further advanced to a Regional Sales Manager role after adding three counties to her team's area of operations. She and her team have consistently exceeded their goals, and this year looks to be no different- she expects to surpass her team's target of 900 sales this year. As she says, "I have always been hitting my target by bringing my team together, supporting them fully, and I know I'm going to make it. When we work together, we achieve our targets, we achieve our goals."

Mary has consistently felt supported by Sistema.bio. When she could not drive the motorcycle initially provided for

field operations, the company gave her a transport stipend and then provided her with a car. She has also enjoyed the autonomy to recruit her own team, which is majority-women, and the chance to learn through sales and leadership training.

Mary not only excels in hitting her own targets, she also helps other Sales Agents and other women in the company succeed. Kenya's first woman Area Sales Manager, Sophia Karwitha, was hired and trained by Mary. Mary even extends her support to people in other departments. Says Jessica Carey, "Mary tends to encourage, coach and lend herself as a form of support and communication to the entire Kenya team, not just her personal team. If you ask Mary 'what do you want to be, what do you want to grow into?', she says 'CEO'. She's really a passionate, hard working and intelligent leader."

Gender-Forward Policies

Today, Sistema.bio in Kenya has **several policies that create a gender-inclusive workplace**. Going beyond the national parental leave laws, Sistema.bio's policy not only offers 3 months of maternity leave and 2 weeks of paternity leave, but also leave for miscarriage, stillbirth, and adoption. Sistema.bio also offers flexible hours for new mothers and provides lactation rooms on site.

In addition, under Sistema.bio's Social Policy, the company collects sex-disaggregated data on job applicants, interviewees, and offers made, as well as on customers, maintains targets for numbers of women hired per department, and mandates regular

gender trainings. Sistema.bio also has an anti-harassment policy which includes discrimination, bullying, and retaliation, and a disciplinary and grievance handling policy.

Finally, Sistema.bio **uses a formula to standardize salaries based on the local market and the role, but not considering the gender of the candidate**. This results in men and women receiving equal pay for equal work.

These policies help create a working environment where women feel heard, valued, counted, and comfortable.

Conclusion

From its inception to the present day, Sistema.bio has been a leader among clean energy SMEs when it comes to gender inclusion in business practices. The company has done so by considering not only the impact gender inclusion would have on women as customers and users of biodigesters but also by making strategic efforts to recruit, hire, train, and advance women in its workforce. This has led to a virtuous circle in which high-performing women recruit, hire, and promote more women with high potential. Sistema.bio now also has the ability to take these best practices and learnings on gender inclusion, which are coming primarily from Kenya, and apply them to Mexico and other countries to expand these impacts globally.

Sistema.bio holds a leading position at the intersection of gender and renewable energy, and the company intends to do more to advance women's inclusion. Ongoing recruiting, training, and engagement initiatives for women employees and customers demonstrate the company's dedication to continuous improvement in the evolving space of gender inclusion within business. Gender inclusion can play a significant role in advancing the business and social impact mission of companies in the renewable energy space, and Sistema.bio's deliberate focus on inclusion in recent years is a shining example for other businesses to follow.



Value For Women Ltd.
86-90 Paul Street
London, EC2A 4NE
valueforwomen@v4w.org