

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Training of Trainers (ToT) Report for PhiBella Industrial PLC, Ethiopia



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Executive Summary

From 27–31 October 2025, the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT delivered a Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Training of Trainers (ToT) for PhiBella Industrial PLC at Addis Amba Hotel, Bahir Dar, under the NORAD-funded Growing Together Program. The training aimed to strengthen inclusive, climate-smart, and market-oriented agri-food systems by ensuring SMEs like PhiBella actively integrate Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in their business operations, extension approaches, and supplier engagement within the soybean and sunflower value chains.

The training targeted staff and trainers involved in technical support, extension, and decision-making, with a strong emphasis on the ToT cascade model to expand reach to farmers, cooperatives, unions, and local extension systems. A total of 39 participants attended (32 men and 7 women), showing a significant gender imbalance in advanced leadership and technical capacity-building spaces an issue acknowledged as a structural barrier that can affect who becomes visible as trainers, mentors, and value chain leaders.

Core sessions clarified key concepts including gender equality, equity, justice, and transformation, stressing that transformation goes beyond numerical representation to address deeper power relations, social norms, and institutional barriers that sustain inequality. Participants reflected on how interventions can unintentionally reinforce inequalities if they do not tackle these root causes.

The training also made a strong business and development case for investing in gender equality, noting that gender gaps in access to resources, finance, information, and leadership can reduce productivity, supply reliability, and innovation. Participants examined common gender gaps within SMEs (recruitment, promotion, leadership roles, access to training) and applied the Reach-Benefit-Empower-Transform (RBET) framework to strengthen gender outcomes in SME activities and supplier/extension models.

In the final sessions, groups identified concrete entry points for applying GESI within PhiBella’s work (extension services, supplier selection, training cascades, and internal HR practices). Overall, the ToT built a strong foundation for mainstreaming GESI in SME operations and oilseed value chains, but the report stresses that without deliberate efforts to increase women’s inclusion in higher-level training and leadership pipelines, ToT models may reproduce existing inequalities rather than transform them.

1. Background and Purpose of the Training

From 27 to 31 October 2025, a Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Training of Trainers (ToT) was delivered for Phibella PLC at Addis Amba Hotel in Bahir Dar. The training was organized as part of the Growing Together Program, which aims to strengthen inclusive, climate-smart, and market-oriented agri-food systems in Ethiopia and the wider East African region. Within this framework, the GESI training was designed to ensure that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) such as Phibella PLC actively integrate gender equality and women's empowerment principles into their business operations, extension approaches, and supplier engagement models.

The training specifically targeted staff and trainers who play a role in technical support, extension, leadership, and decision-making within the oilseed value chains. Given the cascading nature of ToT models, the training sought not only to build individual capacity but also to create a pool of trainers capable of transferring gender-transformative knowledge and practices to farmers, suppliers, cooperatives, and local extension systems.

This session takes participants through a practical and reflective journey on how gender equality strengthens the oilseed value chain and improves overall project outcomes. The focus is on helping trainers and practitioners understand how gender dynamics shape who participates, who benefits, and who holds decision-making power across soybean and sunflower production, processing, and marketing. The discussion highlights the everyday realities of women working in SMEs and value chains: limited access to inputs and finance, unequal workloads, restricted mobility, and low representation in leadership. These issues are linked to broader patterns of norms, roles, and expectations that influence business performance and resilience.

2. Participation and Gender Composition

A total of 39 participants attended the training, of whom 32 were men and 7 were women. This significant gender imbalance highlights a persistent structural challenge within advanced technical and leadership-oriented capacity-building spaces. Men continue to dominate opportunities for higher-level training, which often serve as gateways to influence, visibility, and authority within extension systems, cooperatives, and farmer networks.

Table 1: Summary of participant's profile

Organizations	Male	Female	Total
Awi Zone	1	1	2
Jawi district	7	2	9
North Gojam Zone	1	1	2
Debub Achefer District	11	1	12
Admass Union	1	1	2
Merkeb Union	1	0	1
PhiBela	8	1	9
Belayneh Kindie Farm	1	0	1
Amhara Regional Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI)	1	0	1
Total	32	7	39

This imbalance has implications beyond the training room. Graduates of ToT programs typically act as trainers, mentors, and key resource persons at lower levels. When women are underrepresented at this stage, fewer women are positioned to lead trainings, shape narratives around good agricultural and business practices, or become recognized technical leaders in the oilseed value chains. Over time, this can reinforce male-dominated knowledge systems and limit women's voice, agency, and leadership across the broader value chain.

The training explicitly acknowledged this gap and used it as a learning entry point, encouraging participants and Phibella PLC management to reflect on internal selection criteria, workplace norms, and structural barriers that constrain women's participation in advanced capacity-building opportunities.

3. Training Objectives

The overall objective of the training was to strengthen participants' understanding and practical application of gender equality and women's empowerment in SME operations and value-chain engagement. More specifically, the training aimed to:

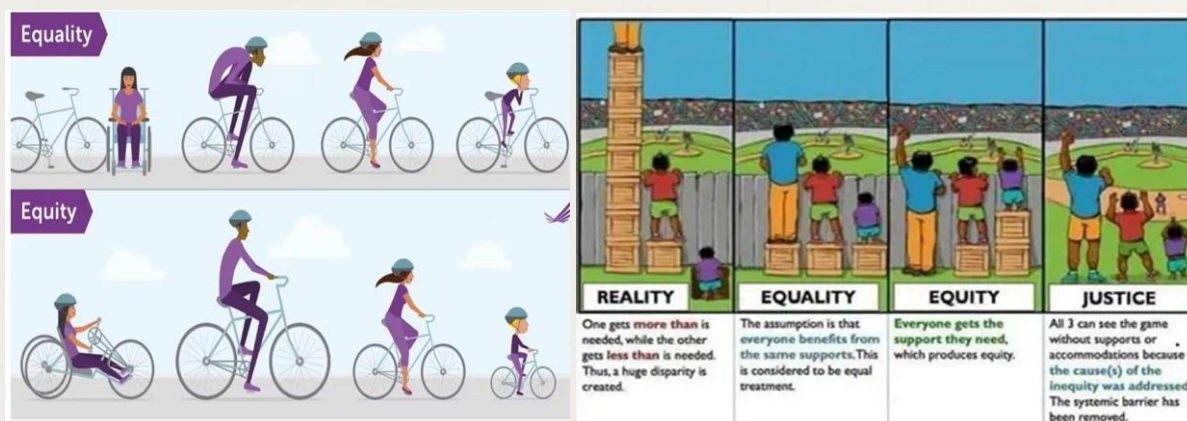
- Strengthen participants' conceptual understanding of gender equality, equity, and related GESI concepts.
- Build practical skills for mainstreaming gender considerations into business operations, extension services, and supplier relationships.
- Equip SME trainers with tools and approaches to cascade gender-transformative training to their teams, partners, and suppliers.
- Promote more inclusive, equitable, and productive workplaces within Phibella PLC and its broader business ecosystem.

4. Key Topics Covered and Training Content

4.1 Core Gender Concepts

The training began with a structured discussion of foundational gender concepts. Participants explored the differences and relationships between gender equality, gender equity, gender justice, and gender transformation. Practical examples from agribusiness, extension services, and household decision-making were used to clarify how these concepts apply in real-world settings.

Emphasis was placed on moving beyond gender equality as numerical balance toward gender transformation, which seeks to address underlying power relations, social norms, and institutional structures that sustain inequality. Participants engaged in group discussions to identify how well-intentioned interventions can sometimes reinforce existing inequalities if these deeper issues are not addressed.



4.2 Why Gender Equality Matters for SMEs and Value Chains

The training highlighted the business, social, and development rationale for investing in gender equality. Sessions demonstrated how gender gaps in access to resources, information, finance, and leadership negatively affect productivity, supply reliability, and innovation within SMEs. Evidence and examples from Ethiopia and East Africa showed that when women are empowered as farmers, workers, and leaders, enterprises benefit through improved quality, consistency, and resilience of supply chains.

Participants reflected on how gender-blind business practices can unintentionally exclude women farmers and workers, and how more inclusive approaches can strengthen both commercial performance and social outcomes.

4.3 Gender Gaps in SMEs

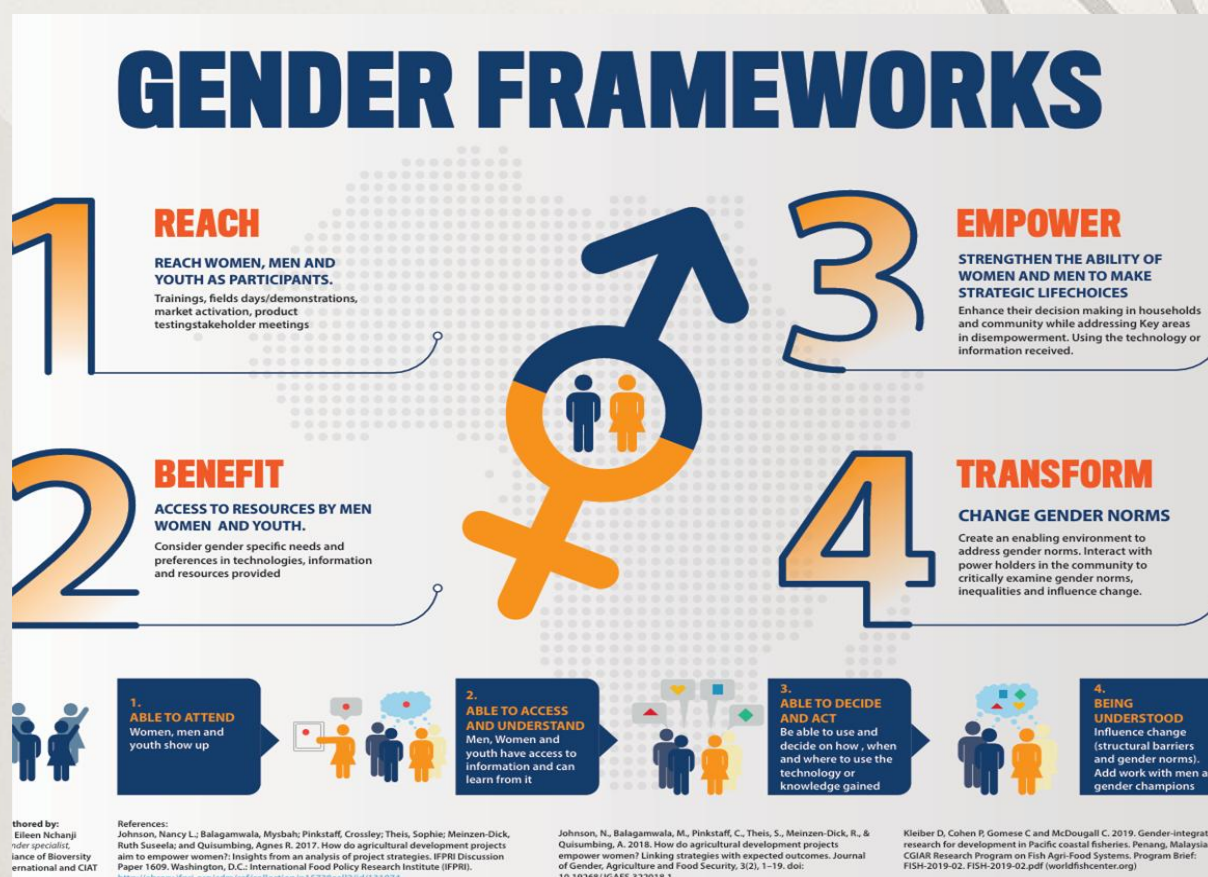
Specific attention was given to common gender gaps within SMEs, including disparities in recruitment, promotion, access to training, leadership roles, and workplace policies. Participants analysed typical SME structures and identified where women tend to be clustered in lower-paid, less visible roles, while men dominate technical, managerial, and decision-making positions.

These discussions were closely linked to the observed gender imbalance in the training itself, reinforcing the importance of intentional strategies to promote women's participation in high-level capacity-building and leadership development.

4.4 Reach-Benefit-Empower-Transform (RBET) Framework

The RBET framework was introduced as a practical tool for assessing and strengthening gender outcomes in programs and business operations. Participants learned how many interventions stop at “reach” or “benefit” without meaningfully empowering women or transforming unequal norms and power relations.

Through case examples relevant to the Growing Together Program, participants practiced applying the RBET lens to SME activities, supplier engagement, and extension models. This helped clarify how Phibella PLC can move toward more gender-transformative approaches in its operations.



4.5 Participation, Leadership, Voice, and Agency

A dedicated module focused on women's participation, leadership, voice, and agency across the oilseed value chains. Discussions explored barriers that limit women's effective participation, such as time poverty, mobility constraints, social norms, and limited access to information and networks.

Participants examined practical strategies to enhance women's leadership within cooperatives, farmer groups, and SME structures, including targeted mentoring, inclusive training design, and supportive workplace policies.



4.6 Application to the Growing Together Program

The final sessions focused on translating learning into practice within the context of the Growing Together Program in Ethiopia and East Africa. Participants worked in groups to identify concrete entry points for integrating GESI principles into Phibella PLC's ongoing activities, including extension services, supplier selection, training cascades, and internal human resource practices.

5. Key Reflections and Emerging Lessons

The training highlighted both progress and persistent challenges. While participants demonstrated strong engagement and growing awareness of gender issues, the low participation of women underscored the need for more deliberate strategies to ensure women's inclusion in advanced training and leadership pipelines. Participants recognized that without intentional action, ToT models risk reproducing existing inequalities rather than transforming them.

The training also reinforced the importance of embedding GESI principles into core business processes, rather than treating them as add-on activities. Participants emphasized the need for continued coaching, follow-up, and institutional commitment to sustain the momentum generated by the training.

6. Conclusion

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment ToT delivered for Phibella PLC provided a strong foundation for integrating GESI principles into SME operations and value-chain engagement. By combining conceptual clarity with practical tools and contextual examples, the training enhanced participants' capacity to promote more inclusive and equitable approaches within the oilseed sector.

However, the observed gender imbalance among participants signals a critical area for improvement. Addressing women's underrepresentation in high-level capacity-building is essential to ensure that gender-transformative outcomes are realized across extension systems, cooperatives, and farmer networks. Moving forward, deliberate efforts will be needed to support women's participation, leadership, and voice at all levels of the Growing Together Program.

Annex 1: List and profile of participants

No	Name of participants	Organization	Position	Sex
1	Habetamu Alemneh	Jawi Woreda Agricultural Office	Crop Team Leader	Male
2	Ayenew Tiruneh	Jawi Woreda Trade Office	Marketing Team Leader	Male
3	Yazachew Aragaw	Jawi Woreda Agricultural Office	Input Team Leader	Male
4	Mulate Tadesse	Jawi Woreda Agricultural Office	Agronomist	Male
5	Birhanu Workineh	Jawi Woreda Agricultural Office	Head of Agricultural Office	Male
6	Aberach Asemare	Awı Zone Agricultural Department	Input Team Leader	Female
7	Minisha Bitew	Admas Union	Marketing Team Leader	Male
8	Henok Lenchamo	Jawi Woreda Cooperative Office	Crop Marketing Team Leader	Male
9	Menegstu Delele	Jawi Woreda Agricultural Office	Extension Team Leader	Male
10	Andualem Ayalew	Awı Zone Agricultural Department	Crop Team Leader	Male
11	Emeytnat Mitiku	Jawi Woreda Primary Cooperative	Store	Female
12	Tegegnech Zerihun	Jawi Woreda Primary Cooperative	Store	Female
13	Worku Abebe	Debub Achefer Woreda Agri Office	Agronomist	Male
14	Mulu Babech	Debub Achefer Woreda Primary Coop	Store	Female
15	Mastewal Yalew	Debub Achefer Woreda Agri Office	Input Team Leader	Male
16	Belete Melaku	Debub Achefer Woreda Primary Coop	Coop Chairman	Male
17	Amdework Liyew	Semen Gojjam Zone Agri Department	Input Team Leader	Male
18	Desalegne Alem	Debub Achefer Woreda Coop. Office	Input Team Leader	Male
19	Anteneh Mekonnen	Debub Achefer Woreda Agri Office	Extension Team Leader	Male
20	Abebe Tiruneh	Debub Achefer Woreda Agri Office	Crop Team Leader	Male
21	Aragaw Alem	Debub Achefer Woreda Agri Office	Agronomist (IDH-Phibela Project)	Male
22	Mekuanent Kassie	Debub Achefer Woreda Agri Office	Expert	Male
23	Muluken Gedif	Merkeb Union	Agri input Marketing Expert	Male
24	Agumas Shitaye	Debub Achefer Woreda Primary Coop	Store	Male
25	Miwodew Tamir	Debub Achefer Woreda Primary Coop	Store	Male
26	Gizenew Degu	Debub Achefer Woreda Trade Office	Marketing Team Leader	Male
27	Yeshewarka Yemenu	Semen Gojjam Zone Agri Department	Input Team Lead	Female
28	Yeshi Sema	Admas Union	Export Marketing Expert	Female
29	Tariku Getachew	Phibela	Raw material Sore Head	Male
30	Mengestu Yimer	Phibela	Store	Male
31	Mulunesh Tilaye	Phibela	Store	Female
32	Tinasae Tesfaw	Phibela	Factory Division Head	Male
33	Yohannes Alemayehu	Phibela	Factory Manger	Male
34	Mulugeta Tesfe	Phibela	Factory Division Head	Male
35	Alamiraw Kassahun	Phibela	Finance Head/Project Finance	Male
36	Belsty Atenafu	Phibela	QC Manger/Project Team Member	Male
37	Dr Getenet Alemawu	Phibela	Project Coordinator	Male
38	Dr Anetenh Abawa	BK Farm	CEO	Male
39	Ayana Denberu	Amhara Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI)	Communication Expert	Male

