

Gender-Responsive Leadership in Supply Chain Management: A Framework for Advancing Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

OSAZEE ONAGHINOR¹, OGECHI THELMA UZOZIE², OLUWAFUNMILAYO JANET ESAN³

¹Independent Researcher, Alberta, Canada

²Independent Researcher, Lagos Nigeria

³Amazon.com, USA

Abstract- *This paper explores the critical role of gender-responsive leadership in supply chain management, proposing a comprehensive framework for advancing inclusive and sustainable growth. As global supply chains become increasingly complex, incorporating gender diversity at leadership levels emerges as a key driver of innovation, resilience, and long-term success. The research highlights the barriers and challenges to gender inclusion in supply chain management and identifies the strategic policies, leadership practices, and organizational changes necessary for overcoming these obstacles. By examining the theoretical foundations of gender-responsive leadership, the study establishes a strong business case for diversity, demonstrating its positive impact on supply chain performance, risk management, and resilience. Furthermore, the paper provides actionable strategies for integrating gender-responsive leadership, leveraging technology, and building leadership capacity for women in supply chain management. The findings suggest that fostering gender diversity is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic advantage for organizations striving for competitive and sustainable supply chain operations. The study concludes by offering recommendations for policymakers and industry leaders and proposes directions for future research in the field.*

Indexed Terms- *Gender-responsive leadership, supply chain management, inclusive growth, diversity, leadership development, sustainable supply chains.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Importance of Gender-Responsive Leadership in Supply Chains

Gender-responsive leadership in supply chain management plays a critical role in fostering inclusive economic growth and enhancing operational efficiency. By ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in leadership roles, businesses can harness diverse perspectives that lead to more innovative decision-making and improved problem-solving capabilities. (Orser, Liao, Riding, Duong, & Catimel, 2021) Studies have shown that organizations with gender-diverse leadership tend to have stronger financial performance, better risk management, and increased adaptability to market disruptions. Inclusive leadership in supply chains contributes to sustainable business practices, as it promotes ethical sourcing, equitable workforce policies, and long-term social impact (Nepal, 2020).

Beyond financial benefits, gender-responsive leadership aligns with global efforts to promote social equity and corporate social responsibility. Organizations that prioritize gender inclusivity demonstrate commitment to sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly those related to gender equality and decent work. These practices not only enhance corporate reputation but also strengthen supplier relationships, as businesses are increasingly expected to comply with ethical labor standards (Holmes, Jones, & Domingo, 2019).

Despite its importance, gender-responsive leadership in supply chain management remains underdeveloped in many regions and industries. Historical biases, structural inequalities, and lack of awareness continue

to hinder progress. However, the growing emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, along with regulatory pressures and changing consumer expectations, is pushing companies to adopt more inclusive policies. By addressing these gaps, organizations can create more resilient and sustainable supply chains that drive both economic and social progress (Fernández, Isakova, Luna, & Rambousek, 2021).

1.2 Challenges and Barriers to Gender Inclusion in Supply Chain Management

One of the primary challenges to gender inclusion in supply chain management is the persistence of traditional gender roles and biases. Historically, supply chain operations—especially in logistics, procurement, and manufacturing—have been male-dominated fields, with limited representation of women in leadership positions. This underrepresentation is often reinforced by cultural norms, workplace stereotypes, and hiring biases that favor men for executive roles. As a result, many women face difficulties in career advancement, limiting their ability to influence strategic decision-making in supply chains (Ruel, Fritz, & Subramanian, 2020).

Another major barrier is the lack of gender-inclusive policies and workplace structures that support women's career growth. Issues such as unequal pay, insufficient mentorship opportunities, and inadequate work-life balance policies disproportionately affect women, discouraging them from pursuing long-term careers in supply chain management. Additionally, many organizations lack structured programs to attract, train, and retain women in key operational roles, further exacerbating the gender gap in leadership positions (Bulmer, Riera, & Rodríguez, 2021).

Structural and institutional challenges also play a role in limiting gender inclusion. Many countries and industries still lack strong legal frameworks that promote gender equality in corporate leadership. Even in regions where policies exist, enforcement remains weak, leading to slow progress. Furthermore, gender disparities in access to education and professional training in supply chain-related fields contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership.

Overcoming these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach involving policy reforms, corporate commitment, and cultural change within industries (Kabeer, 2021).

1.3 Objectives and Scope of the Study

This study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for advancing gender-responsive leadership in supply chain management, with a focus on fostering inclusive and sustainable growth. By examining key challenges, opportunities, and best practices, this research seeks to highlight the importance of gender diversity in leadership roles and its impact on supply chain performance. Through an evidence-based approach, the study will explore how organizations can implement gender-inclusive policies to drive operational excellence, innovation, and corporate sustainability.

The scope of this study includes an analysis of leadership theories relevant to gender inclusion in supply chain management, the business case for diversity, and regulatory frameworks promoting gender equity. Additionally, the research will examine technological advancements and strategic initiatives that can facilitate greater gender representation in leadership roles. Case studies of organizations that have successfully integrated gender-responsive leadership into their supply chains will also be explored to provide practical insights.

Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on diversity and inclusion in global supply chains by offering a structured approach to gender-responsive leadership. The findings and recommendations will be valuable for business leaders, policymakers, and scholars interested in promoting equitable and sustainable supply chain management practices. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study aims to drive meaningful change in how supply chains operate, ensuring that gender inclusion becomes a fundamental aspect of leadership and decision-making processes.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

2.1 Leadership Theories and Their Application to Gender-Inclusive Management

Leadership theories provide a foundational understanding of how gender-inclusive management can be effectively implemented within supply chains. Transformational leadership, for instance, emphasizes vision, motivation, and empowerment—traits that align closely with gender-responsive leadership. Leaders who adopt this approach inspire and mentor employees, fostering an inclusive workplace that values diverse perspectives (Kamalizeni, Hoque, Kader, & Mapudzi, 2018). Transformational leadership has been linked to higher employee satisfaction, increased innovation, and better decision-making, making it a crucial model for advancing gender diversity in supply chain management (Otokiti, Igwe, Ewim, & Ibeh, 2021; Paul, Abbey, Onukwulu, Agho, & Louis, 2021).

Servant leadership, another relevant theory, prioritizes the needs of employees and stakeholders over traditional hierarchical power structures. This model aligns well with gender-responsive leadership, as it fosters collaboration, inclusivity, and shared decision-making. By emphasizing ethical leadership and community-building, servant leadership creates an environment where women and underrepresented groups can thrive in leadership roles. Organizations that embrace this approach can break down barriers that have historically prevented women from advancing in supply chain roles (Moss, 2019).

Additionally, situational leadership theory underscores the importance of adaptability in leadership styles, depending on the workforce's needs and challenges. In the context of gender-inclusive management, leaders must recognize that women in supply chains may face unique obstacles, such as limited access to leadership training or biased workplace cultures. By adopting a flexible and supportive leadership style, organizations can create more equitable opportunities for women and foster a culture of continuous professional growth. The integration of these leadership theories into supply chain management provides a strong foundation for fostering diversity and inclusion (Ogbeta, Mbata, & Katas, 2021).

2.2 The Business Case for Gender Diversity in Supply Chains

Gender diversity in supply chains is not only a matter of social responsibility but also a strategic business advantage. Organizations that prioritize gender-inclusive leadership tend to outperform their peers in financial performance, operational efficiency, and corporate reputation. Studies have demonstrated that companies with diverse leadership teams are more innovative, better equipped to manage risk, and more responsive to evolving market demands. By integrating gender diversity into supply chain management, businesses can enhance productivity and drive sustainable economic growth (Hassan, Collins, Babatunde, Alabi, & Mustapha, 2021).

Moreover, a diverse workforce contributes to improved problem-solving and decision-making. When supply chain teams include individuals from diverse backgrounds, they are more likely to develop creative and effective solutions to complex logistical challenges (Morehead Dworkin & Schipani, 2018). Diverse leadership teams also bring varied perspectives that help organizations anticipate market trends and customer preferences more accurately. This is particularly critical in global supply chains, where cultural competency and inclusivity play a significant role in establishing strong supplier and stakeholder relationships (Odunaiya, Soyombo, & Ogunsola, 2021).

Beyond internal benefits, gender diversity enhances brand reputation and stakeholder trust. Consumers, investors, and regulatory bodies increasingly expect businesses to demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Companies that actively promote gender diversity in their supply chains are more likely to attract ethical investors, gain competitive advantages in procurement contracts, and maintain positive relationships with key partners. Thus, advancing gender diversity in supply chain management is not just a moral imperative—it is a strategic necessity for long-term business success (Wilton, Sanchez, Unzueta, Kaiser, & Caluori, 2019).

2.3 Policy and Regulatory Frameworks Promoting Gender Equality in Supply Chain Management

The advancement of gender equality in supply chain management is increasingly supported by international policy frameworks and regulatory guidelines. Organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and

the International Labour Organization (ILO) have developed global standards encouraging gender inclusivity in corporate leadership. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), emphasize the need for businesses to foster inclusive work environments and eliminate gender-based discrimination in employment practices (Ewim, Omokhoa, Ogundeji, & Ibeh, 2021).

In many regions, governments have enacted policies that mandate gender diversity in leadership and procurement processes. For instance, the European Union (EU) has introduced corporate governance directives that require companies to ensure gender balance on boards and executive teams. Similarly, various national governments have established supplier diversity programs that incentivize businesses to partner with women-owned enterprises. These policies encourage organizations to integrate gender considerations into their supply chain strategies, leading to more equitable business practices (EZEANOCHIE, AFOLABI, & AKINSOOTO, 2021).

Despite progress, enforcement of gender equality policies remains a challenge in many industries. While legal frameworks exist, companies must take proactive steps to implement and measure the impact of gender-inclusive policies. This includes developing gender-equity audits, reporting mechanisms, and targeted initiatives to address disparities in hiring, promotions, and leadership development. Strengthening policy implementation, combined with corporate commitment, can drive meaningful progress toward gender-responsive leadership in supply chain management, ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

III. STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING GENDER-RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP IN SUPPLY CHAINS

3.1 Implementing Gender-Inclusive Policies and Practices

Implementing gender-inclusive policies and practices is crucial for advancing gender-responsive leadership within supply chains. The first step in this process is establishing a clear organizational commitment to

diversity and inclusion. This involves setting measurable goals, such as increasing the number of women in leadership roles, improving gender balance across different levels of the supply chain, and ensuring equal access to career advancement opportunities. Additionally, organizations should create supportive policies that address unconscious bias, promote flexible work arrangements, and encourage equal pay for equal work (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018).

Effective gender-inclusive practices also include fostering an inclusive workplace culture. This can be achieved through training programs focused on diversity awareness, anti-discrimination policies, and leadership development initiatives for women (Cravero, 2018). It is essential that these practices are embedded into the organizational culture, ensuring they are not seen as temporary measures but as integral to the overall business strategy. By promoting inclusive policies, organizations create an environment where all employees, regardless of gender, feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best work (Elujide et al., 2021; Elumilade, Ogundeji, Achumie, Omokhoa, & Omowole, 2021).

Moreover, supplier diversity programs play an essential role in advancing gender inclusivity in the broader supply chain ecosystem. These programs encourage organizations to source goods and services from women-owned businesses and support gender-equitable procurement practices. Implementing such strategies not only enhances gender diversity but also promotes economic empowerment and equal opportunities for women entrepreneurs. By aligning internal policies with these external practices, organizations contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable global supply chain (Kalkanci, Rahmani, & Toktay, 2019).

3.2 Leveraging Technology and Data Analytics for Gender Equity

Technology and data analytics play a pivotal role in advancing gender equity in supply chain management. The use of data analytics allows organizations to identify gender disparities within the workforce, supply chain operations, and leadership positions. By collecting and analyzing demographic data,

companies can uncover patterns of inequality, track the effectiveness of diversity initiatives, and make data-driven decisions to enhance gender inclusivity. Additionally, advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), can help organizations analyze recruitment processes, identify unconscious bias, and streamline the promotion of women into leadership positions (BALOGUN, OGUNSOLA, & SAMUEL, 2021).

Technology also enables organizations to provide targeted training and career development programs for women in the supply chain. E-learning platforms, mentorship programs, and virtual leadership courses are tools that can help women develop the skills needed to advance in the field. These technologies can also connect women with industry networks and role models, providing them with the support and inspiration to break through gender barriers in supply chain management.

Furthermore, the integration of blockchain technology into supply chain management can enhance transparency, enabling organizations to track the progress of gender diversity initiatives. By using blockchain to monitor gender diversity in supplier networks and leadership teams, companies can ensure that they meet their diversity goals and hold themselves accountable. Leveraging technology and data analytics provides organizations with the insights and tools needed to promote gender equity, ensuring that progress is measured and sustained over time (Afolabi & Akinsooto, 2021; Alonge et al., 2021).

3.3 Capacity Building and Leadership Development for Women in Supply Chain Management

Capacity building and leadership development programs for women are key strategies for advancing gender-responsive leadership in supply chains. Such initiatives aim to equip women with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to succeed in supply chain management roles, particularly in leadership positions. These programs focus on developing both technical and soft skills, such as strategic thinking, negotiation, and team management, which are critical for effective leadership in the supply chain sector (Adepoju et al., 2021).

Mentorship and sponsorship programs are especially valuable for women in supply chains, as they provide opportunities for guidance, networking, and career advancement. Having access to mentors—both male and female—who can offer advice and support helps women navigate the challenges they may encounter in the industry, including balancing work-life commitments, overcoming gender bias, and breaking into male-dominated sectors. These mentorship relationships foster personal growth and confidence, which are essential for advancing to leadership positions (Sabeti, Kouhizadeh, Sarkis, & Shen, 2019).

Moreover, organizations must invest in training initiatives that focus on the specific barriers women face in supply chain management. This includes offering leadership development programs, workshops on resilience and self-empowerment, and providing access to industry events and forums where women can showcase their leadership potential (Park & Li, 2021). By creating an environment that fosters continuous learning and development, organizations ensure that women are equipped to lead and drive change within the supply chain sector. Such capacity-building efforts not only support individual growth but also contribute to a more diverse and inclusive workforce in the long term (Adebisi, Aigbedion, Ayorinde, & Onukwulu, 2021).

IV. INTEGRATING GENDER-RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

4.1 Linking Gender Inclusion to Supply Chain Resilience and Performance

Integrating gender-responsive leadership into supply chain management is essential for enhancing both resilience and overall performance. Diverse teams bring a range of perspectives, skills, and solutions that contribute to more adaptive and innovative supply chains (Garnier et al., 2020). Gender inclusion strengthens problem-solving capabilities and fosters creativity, which is critical in an era of constant change and uncertainty. Companies with diverse leadership teams can better respond to disruptions, such as market volatility, natural disasters, or geopolitical tensions, by utilizing diverse insights to develop flexible strategies (Sam-Bulya, Omokhoa, Ewim, & Achumie).

Research has shown that organizations with gender-diverse leadership teams often exhibit better decision-making, which translates into improved financial and operational performance. By integrating women into leadership roles, companies can enhance their decision-making processes, improve collaboration across teams, and increase organizational efficiency. Gender-inclusive leadership creates an environment where diverse viewpoints are valued, driving better outcomes in terms of productivity, risk mitigation, and adaptability in an increasingly complex global supply chain (Moreno-Gómez, Lafuente, & Vaillant, 2018).

Moreover, a focus on gender inclusion can lead to long-term sustainability by enhancing a company's reputation. Companies that prioritize gender equality in their leadership structures often experience higher levels of employee satisfaction and loyalty, resulting in better retention rates and improved talent attraction. This sustainable workforce model supports long-term performance, ultimately making the company more competitive in the market while also contributing to broader social and economic goals (Adeleke, Igunma, & Nwokediegwu).

4.2 Collaborative Approaches Between Public and Private Sectors

Collaborative approaches between the public and private sectors are key to fostering gender-responsive leadership in supply chains. Both sectors have unique capabilities and resources that, when combined, can create more inclusive and effective supply chain systems. Public sector policies and regulations can drive corporate accountability, ensuring that companies are incentivized to adopt gender-inclusive practices. Public sector leadership in promoting gender equity can lead to more supportive environments for companies to develop and implement gender-responsive supply chain strategies (Braun, 2018).

Private sector companies, on the other hand, have the ability to innovate and lead by example. By voluntarily adopting gender-inclusive leadership practices, businesses can serve as models for other organizations and influence broader industry standards. Collaboration between these sectors can lead to shared best practices, increased knowledge exchange, and

pooled resources for initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality in supply chains (Ogbeta et al., 2021).

For example, governments can partner with industry groups and companies to promote gender-focused procurement policies, offer incentives for supplier diversity, and fund programs that support women's leadership in supply chains. Through such collaboration, both sectors can create an ecosystem that supports the growth and development of women in supply chain leadership roles. Ultimately, public-private collaboration accelerates the implementation of gender-inclusive strategies, benefiting not only the organizations involved but also the broader economy and society.

4.3 Overcoming Resistance to Gender-Inclusive Supply Chain Practices

Overcoming resistance to gender-inclusive practices in supply chains is a significant challenge that requires both systemic changes and cultural transformation. One of the primary reasons for resistance is the persistence of deep-seated biases and stereotypes that place women at a disadvantage in leadership roles. These biases can manifest in various ways, including unequal access to networking opportunities, exclusion from decision-making processes, and a lack of mentorship for women. Overcoming this resistance involves confronting these biases and establishing organizational cultures that value diversity and inclusivity (Otokiti et al., 2021).

Effective leadership is essential in addressing resistance. Senior executives and managers must lead by example, demonstrating a commitment to gender inclusion through both their actions and policies. By publicly supporting gender-responsive initiatives, leaders set a tone that encourages other members of the organization to follow suit. Additionally, training and awareness programs focused on unconscious bias and diversity can help employees recognize and address prejudices that may affect their decision-making and interactions with colleagues (Wahl, 2010).

Furthermore, resistance can be reduced by emphasizing the business case for gender diversity. Organizations must communicate the tangible benefits of gender-inclusive supply chain practices, such as enhanced resilience, improved innovation, and better

financial performance. By highlighting successful case studies and sharing the experiences of companies that have embraced gender diversity, organizations can inspire other companies to adopt similar practices. Overcoming resistance requires a comprehensive approach that combines leadership commitment, employee engagement, and clear communication about the benefits of gender inclusion for both the company and society as a whole (Griffiths, Grisoni, Manfredi, Still, & Tzanakou, 2020).

V. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The integration of gender-responsive leadership in supply chain management has been shown to significantly contribute to the overall resilience and performance of supply chains. The research highlights the importance of leadership diversity in enhancing decision-making, problem-solving, and innovation within supply chain operations. Gender-inclusive leadership not only strengthens organizational flexibility but also promotes a culture of creativity that allows supply chains to adapt to disruptions more effectively.

Additionally, gender-responsive policies and leadership practices have been identified as key drivers of improved organizational performance and sustainability. Gender inclusion is linked to increased productivity, employee satisfaction, and long-term profitability. However, barriers such as deeply ingrained biases and resistance to change remain significant obstacles to fully embracing gender-inclusive practices. The study underscores the necessity of overcoming these challenges through leadership commitment, awareness-building, and supportive policies that foster an inclusive work environment. Finally, the role of public-private collaboration in advancing gender-responsive leadership was emphasized as an essential step toward creating an ecosystem that encourages gender diversity at all levels of supply chain management. By working together, the public and private sectors can create systemic changes that promote equality, diversity, and inclusivity within the supply chain ecosystem.

For policymakers, the findings of this study highlight the need to create regulatory frameworks and policies

that explicitly support gender equality in supply chains. Governments can play a pivotal role by offering incentives for companies that prioritize gender diversity in their leadership teams and supply chain operations. Policies promoting gender-inclusive procurement, supporting women's access to leadership positions, and encouraging the development of gender-responsive supply chain strategies are key to advancing this agenda.

Industry leaders, on the other hand, must prioritize gender diversity as a strategic objective. By embedding gender-responsive leadership into their corporate culture, supply chain executives can foster an environment that is conducive to collaboration, innovation, and resilience. Moreover, industry leaders should actively advocate for gender diversity in their supply chain networks, influencing suppliers and partners to adopt similar policies. Companies that lead by example will not only benefit from improved supply chain performance but also enhance their corporate reputation, attracting top talent and strengthening customer loyalty. Finally, both policymakers and industry leaders must recognize that advancing gender equality in supply chains is not a one-time effort, but a continuous process of adaptation and improvement. Regular reviews of policies, practices, and leadership structures will ensure sustained progress and alignment with broader societal goals of equality and sustainability.

Future research in the field of gender-responsive leadership in supply chain management should focus on exploring the long-term impacts of gender diversity on supply chain resilience and performance across various industries. While current studies highlight the benefits of gender inclusion, further research is needed to establish robust metrics and benchmarks for evaluating its direct impact on organizational outcomes, such as profitability, risk management, and operational efficiency.

Additionally, future studies should examine how cultural and regional factors influence the implementation and success of gender-responsive practices in supply chains. Understanding the unique challenges faced by women in leadership roles in different geographical and cultural contexts will allow organizations to tailor their diversity initiatives more

effectively. Research could also investigate the role of gender in supply chain governance structures, including the decision-making processes and the distribution of power within supply chain networks. Finally, research on the intersection of technology and gender inclusion in supply chain leadership could uncover new avenues for innovation. As technologies like blockchain, artificial intelligence, and automation continue to transform supply chain operations, it is crucial to understand how these tools can be leveraged to advance gender equality further. This line of inquiry could lead to the development of new strategies and frameworks that integrate gender-responsive leadership into the future of supply chain management.

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