



FOREWARD – LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT



“Gender equality, rooted in human rights, is recognized both as an essential development goal on its own and as vital to accelerating sustainable development.”

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are at the heart of **ayzh**. Our gender equality strategy is launched at a pivotal moment in international development. The new Sustainable Development Goals (adopted by 193 governments) recognize that gender equality and women’s leadership are essential for the health and well-being of all people and for the planet.

ayzh (pronounced “eyes”) stands for seeing women’s health through a new lens – a lens that merges unique expertise, knowledge, and networks at the intersection of global health, appropriate technology, and sustainable business. Core to the **ayzh** model is a brand and culture built to enable and celebrate the social and economic health of women. As we transition to scale, I commit **ayzh** to supporting the Gender Empowerment Principles and to empowering women in the workplace, marketplace, and community.

With this Gender Equality Strategy (effective 2015 – 2020), **ayzh** is well placed to ensure that gender equality and women’s empowerment is an essential and integral part of sustainability strategy, integrated into every aspect of its work, particularly around governance, workplace equity, sustainable and equitable poverty alleviation, and access to products and services designed specifically to benefit girls. **Ayzh** also intends to move towards gender holistically as a system that includes both men and women.

This gender strategy serves as both a pledge to take action to accelerate gender parity and a framework for guiding our path to becoming the leading global brand of women’s health products for the developing world. By pairing a holistic approach to addressing reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCH+A) with a proven business model and commercial scaling path, we are confident that **ayzh** will make significant contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, and move closer to fulfilling the rights of all women and men and to building a more inclusive and sustainable world.

Zubaida Bai
ayzh Founder & CEO



ayzh Gender Strategy

The Challenge

In light of **ayzh** having a RMNCH+A gender-based mission and vision, our work on gender equality has only just begun. Simply because RMNCH+A initiatives are at the core of our business, we cannot assume that our primary business activity (development and distribution of life-saving, life-changing products for women in low-resource settings) *“automatically promotes gender equality just because the main beneficiaries are women and girls”* (Global Affairs Canada).

Addressing this challenge, the purpose of our Gender Strategy is to further define **ayzh** in the category of **women impact businesses**¹ that are women-led and have intentional work place strategies around gender, beyond simply having products that benefit women and girls. Ultimately, we aim to work towards broadening our strategy to move towards gender more holistically as a system that includes both men and women. Acknowledging that our strategy will evolve and become more comprehensive over time, we intend to initially understand and monitor gender equality across three key impact areas²:

Community – Impact on local economy, community stakeholders, clients, and ultimately our target beneficiaries through local employment and empowerment opportunities, targeting underserved markets, and product development.

Workplace – How well our culture and workplace supports the needs of women through its human resource strategy and work environment.

Governance – Representation of women in the leadership and workforce of our organization

Our Framework

Across our four impact areas, we commit to integrating the **Women’s Empowerment Principles**, produced and disseminated by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the United Nations Global Compact. **ayzh** aims to be a leader in putting the Women’s Empowerment Principles into practice and measuring progress towards fulfillment. As our strategy evolves in the longer term, we intend to address more systemic gender challenges in the family planning space (promoting equality in decision-making) and other barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing quality health care, including innovative grassroots advocacy initiatives to build demand creation for the same.

¹ The term “woman impact businesses” is being used to define a new platform in India, hosted by USAID.

² Adapted from the GIIRS rating system

Strategy & Metrics

COMMUNITY

WEPs Principle 4 – Education and Training

*Education and training are essential components to the **ayzh** model.*

- **Training** – As our expansion model (creation of new production and distribution facilities) is developed and implemented, we intend to build in a strategy for the inclusion of women in the leadership and execution of the franchises, such as training young women to assume leadership roles within regional franchises. **ayzh** also offers product training and education to healthcare workers as a way to increase adherence to best practices.
- **Empowerment Camps** – Camps involve setting up advocacy booths (moving from products to public education) to build demand among pregnant women for safe and healthy birth practices through informational materials, educational activities and clean birth kit samples.

WEPs Principle 5 – Enterprise Development, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices

*As **ayzh** scales through model replication, we are committed to building gender equity into an integrated local supply chain for RMNCH+A products, and continuing using a gender lens to drive the strategy of product development.*

As we replicate our model across India with the creation of regional expansion hubs, we aim to create economic and leadership opportunity for traditionally low-income and underemployed women. With improved health, women are more likely to lift themselves out of poverty – likewise, with increased opportunity for consistent and meaningful income generation, women with improved livelihoods are more likely to demand and access quality healthcare.

- **Job creation** – Increase the number of women **ayzh** employs to package and assemble our kits by 50 percent by 2020.
- **Design “for women by women”** – Ensure products are developed with feedback from female stakeholders (pregnant women, mothers, and health workers). We intend to use research tools such as surveys, interviews, narrative identities, and empowerment camps to innovatively collect meaningful data from women stakeholders. We also intend that our Research and Development team at **ayzh** is at least 50 percent comprised of female employees.

- **Target underserved markets of women** – Select geographic focus for distribution that will target underserved and hard-to-reach populations of women, building partnerships to help us access and market to the same (building on the success of our partnerships with The Palladium Group, TOMS, and JHPIEGO).
- **Adherence to standards** – Ensure that any jobs created conform to International Labor Organization standards, which outline that those jobs must be productive, deliver fair income, be conducted in a secure workspace and supported by local protection.

WEPs Principle 6 – Community Leadership and Engagement

ayzh is in the business of saving and changing the lives of women girls. By creating products and services that benefit women and girls along the RMNCH+A continuum (i.e., clean birth kits, newborn care kits, menstrual hygiene kits, etc.), we increase access to those products via our innovative business model and industry leadership.

- **Expand advocacy initiatives** – Explore new approaches to transform the health and education we provide to women, girls, and their families, including developing a plan for entering the family planning space and engaging men to support the health and decision-making power of women.

WORKPLACE

WEPs Principle 2 – Equal Opportunity, Inclusion & Nondiscrimination

ayzh is committed to continually developing new ways to ensure gender equity in the workplace and ensuring the unique needs of women, especially pregnant women and those returning from maternity leave, are supported as part of our workplace culture and company policies.

- **Build gender equality into HR policies and procedures** – We are currently in the process of updating our Human Resource policies and procedure to include benefits that support working mothers and families such as breastfeeding support in the workplace; covering the expenses of employees with children under 3 years old to pay a caretaker to attend business-related travel more than two days; and ensuring grievance policies that promote respect and dignity across genders and levels of authority in the workplace.

WEPs Principle 3 – Health, Safety and Freedom from Violence

ayzh is committed to addressing gender-specific health and safety issues, including an explicit, well-publicized policy of zero tolerance towards gender-based violence and harassment.

➤ **Support of WASH in the workplace**

Workplaces have been identified as a crucial ‘extra-household’ setting for WASH. The impacts of inadequate WASH for workers are rarely studied, despite anecdotal evidence of detrimental effects including on employees’ health, dignity, and their attendance and productive contribution to the economy.³

ayzh intends to develop the following initiatives to increase WASH access and behaviors in the workplace:

- *Provision of sanitary pads* – Contribute to employee welfare, retention and productivity by enhancing their own health and empowerment, as well as that of their families (potentially reducing time spent caring for sick children).
- *WASH at the Workplace Pledge⁴* – Explore this initiative from the World Business Council on Sustainable Development that requires signatories to implement “access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene at the workplace at an appropriate level of standard for all employees in all premises under their control.”

Data Collection – Build survey data to ascertain current status and our impact on women’s access to WASH in the workplace. Through helping women adopt healthier ways of living, we intend to measure how this may lead to higher work productivity and fewer sick days⁵.

GOVERNANCE

WEPs Principle 1 – Leadership Promotes Gender Equality

In an effort to bolster high-level corporate leadership for gender equality, the UN Women/UN Global Compact launched a CEO Statement of Support for the Women’s Empowerment Principles. In 2016, ayzh joined more than 1248 business leaders around the world that signed the statement, demonstrating leadership on gender equality.

³ Private Sector and water supply, sanitation and hygiene: <http://worldtoilet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Private-Sector-and-water-supply-sanitation-and-hygiene-1.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.wbcsd.org/washatworkplace.aspx>

⁵ https://www.accenture.com/t20160307T065657__w_/us-en/_acnmedia/PDF-4/Accenture-Strategy-Corporate-Disruptors-Full-Report.pdf

Although women account for almost half of the college-educated workforce in the US, they hold only 19 percent of board seats, and are only 4.6 percent of CEOs.⁶ **ayzh** is currently more than 80 percent owned and operated by women. As our team continues to grow in numbers and attract talent from diverse fields and groups of professionals, we aim to maintain at least an equal representation of women in the leadership and workforce of ayzh.

- **Maintain equal representation of male and female leadership**
 - Achieve at least 50/50 female and male Board of Advisor representation by 2020.
 - Achieve 50/50 female and male Board of Directors representation by 2018.
 - Aim for 50/50 female and male staffing at any given time
 - Aim for our direct packaging and assembly line to be 100 percent operated by women

Next Steps

As our Gender Strategy is still “work in progress” in draft form, we plan to move forward with the following steps to build more functionality and additional metrics into the overall strategy.

1. **Capacity building** – As we plan our growth strategy we will ensure to build internal capacity and make in an integral part of a few profiles.
2. **Dissemination** – We will explore if there would be avenues where this document could be shared publically as setting standards for Gender Strategy in the Social Enterprise space.
3. **Scale and Integration** – We will integrate this strategy as part of our overall strategic planning efforts, also integrating impact on stakeholders especially women a part of our Monitoring and Evaluation plan, and integrate gender strategy into the development of our scaling plan with the Franchise model.

⁶ World Economic Forum blog post (January 2016): <http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/sheryl-sandberg-men-still-run-the-world-and-it-s-not-going-that-well>