

Nacional Financiera:

leader in the implementation of the gender approach in Development Banking for the empowerment of women in Mexico

In Mexico, Nacional Financiera (Nafin) leads the way in reducing gender gaps in financial inclusion with innovative programs that offer accessible financing and promote equal opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Through initiatives such as the Gender Working Group and adherence to international standards, it seeks to strengthen equitable access to financial services and foster more inclusive and sustainable development. This article examines its efforts and its impact on women's economic empowerment.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION GAPS IN LATIN AMERICA

Financial inclusion in Latin America has faced significant challenges in recent years. According to the Latin American Development Bank (CAF), approximately 61% of people in the region do not save, and those who do mostly use informal methods. In addition, half of the adult population still does not have access to the formal financial system. Obstacles include high operational costs, limited demand, and ineffective regulatory frameworks.

In Mexico, in particular, financial inclusion also presents significant challenges. The National Banking and Securities Commission (CNBV) emphasizes that financial inclusion in Mexico is defined by access to and use of formal financial services, consumer protection, and financial education. According to data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography - INEGI) and the 2023 National Survey on Financial Inclusion (ENIF), approximately 54%



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of adults in Mexico have some formal financial product. There are significant disparities between urban and rural areas, and a persistent gender gap. And, the percentage of access to a formal financial product for women is 62%, while for men it is 74%.

DEVELOPMENT BANKING AS A SOLUTION TO THE FINANCIAL INCLUSION GAP

Development banking plays a crucial role in promoting financial inclusion, as its mission is to foster sustainable and equitable economic development. By addressing the issue of financial inclusion, development banking facilitates access to formal financial services for marginalized and underserved populations, thus promoting equal economic opportunity. This not only boosts economic growth by integrating more people into the formal economy, but also strengthens communities' financial resilience, reduces poverty, and improves quality of life.

In 2015, Nacional Financiera, with support from the Instituto Nacional del Emprendedor (National Institute of Entrepreneurs - INADEM) and the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (National Institute of Women - INMUJERES), developed and launched the Support Program for Women Entrepreneurs with two financing schemes, as it aimed to serve two segments of the business pyramid: at the base, there was *Crecamos Juntas* (Let's Grow Together), a product that served individuals with loans of up to 300,000 Mexican pesos (USD 14,800) for working capital and fixed assets. No collateral or mortgage guarantee. This program was part of a formalization strategy of the federal government. If the individuals formalized their integration into the tax system, they



would access a series of benefits from various institutions, including Nafin, with this financing.

One step above the base of the business pyramid was the *Mujeres PYME* (Women SMEs) program, which served women with more established businesses with loans of up to 5 million pesos (USD 246,000), without mortgage guarantee. In 2015, this feature was innovative, as at that time intermediaries could ask for collateral. Ownership statistics in Mexico remain as follows: for every ten properties, seven are owned by men. To guarantee support for women entrepreneurs, banks were required to validate that the company was owned by women (a female individual) or that 51% of the share capital belonged to women. In 2019, in a second phase, seeking to further involve women in decision-making, the selection criteria was expanded to include companies whose women chaired the board of directors or, where applicable, represented the majority of the board of directors.

During the administration of former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, gender parity was promoted and social programs benefiting women, especially indigenous women, were implemented. In addition, the National Program for Equality between Women and Men 2020-2024 was

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published. Under these guidelines, in 2024, Nafin launched the updated version of its financial program for women entrepreneurs, called *MujerEs Industria*. A gender-responsive product that aims to boost, through financing, women-led businesses in the industrial sector, supporting their participation and empowerment in the economic sphere. At the same time, the program will strengthen financial decision-making by providing non-financial services such as a business assessment and gender-sensitive training.

With a portfolio of 2 billion pesos (USD 98.5 million), the program provides financing to women entrepreneurs or women-led MSMEs in the industrial sector for up to 5 million pesos (USD 246 million), without mortgage guarantee, for working capital,

modernization, and equipment.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN MEXICO

What makes it possible to create these gender-responsive products are the forums and dialogues within the Bank, as they give greater visibility to the problem of the gender gap and financial inclusion in the country. These are issues that tend to be unknown or that require awareness within the different Work Units.

For this reason, in 2022, Nafin announced the adoption of its first Gender Equality Policy, which establishes guidelines for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment at the institutional level, as well as within its programs and projects. In 2023, the bank adopted a Gender Action Plan (GAP) to mainstream gender perspectives into Nafin's operations over the next three years. This plan made it possible to obtain the first sex-disaggregated data and integrated a new monitoring practice by officially requesting information from different areas of the bank. In November 2024, three countries and their development banks— Banco de Desarrollo Productivo (BDP) in Bolivia, Nacional Financiera (Nafin) in Mexico, and Banco Ciudad de Buenos Aires in Argentina – committed to increasing gender capacity in Public Banking by joining the Gender Equality Seal for Public Financial Institutions (SIG-IF) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and CAF.

Today, more than ever, Nacional Financiera assumes its role as an instrument for implementing important socioeconomic transformations in the country. In particular, it is committed to the transformation currently led by



Mexico's first female president through the 2025-2030 National Development Plan, which seeks to build a "Republic of and for women" and establishes the promotion of substantive Equality and women's rights as a cross-cutting axis of action. From development banking, Nafin will focus on addressing existing gender gaps, offering sustainable and inclusive products and services that facilitate women's access to and participation in the Mexican Financial System.

LAUNCH OF THE GENDER WORKING GROUP

In February 2025, Nacional Financiera, in a further effort to institutionalize and promote gender equality, took a further step by actively integrating the gender perspective into both its internal operations and external strategies. This progress is materialized by the recent authorization for the creation of a Gender Working Group, which will be coordinated by the bank's senior management. This group will have specific objectives, including:

- ▶ Ensuring a balanced distribution of roles and responsibilities, in which both sexes are equally considered and valued.
- ▶ Analyzing opportunities and

designing strategies to integrate a gender perspective into the bank's operation and culture.

- ▶ Generating gender-responsive solutions, agreements, and work plans. Determining the implications, costs, and business opportunities of implementing the Gender Equality Policy.
- ▶ Preparing periodic reports on activities and progress for submission to the Sustainable Finance Committee, among others.

CONCLUSIÓN

The Gender Working Group provides structure, coordination, accountability, monitoring, and evaluation of both Gender-focused policies and financial products. This will allow for faster and more coordinated adjustments to the bank's programs, with the goal of increasing the impact and volume of support provided to women entrepreneurs in Mexico.

The integration of the gender perspective and approach at Nacional Financiera in Mexico is not only a step toward equality, but also a key strategy for fostering more inclusive and sustainable development. With the creation of the Gender Working Group, the bank reaffirms its commitment to being a leader in promoting gender equality in the financial sector and in society at large.



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