

Global Sisters: Measuring up for growth

This case study is designed to help those interested or engaged in impact measurement by providing insights into the learnings from the development and ongoing evolution of Global Sisters’ Outcome and Impact Measurement (OIM) processes.

# Key take outs

* Global Sisters’ OIM has supported growth through providing: confidence to scale their operations; insight into their customer experience; evidence to help develop new initiatives; and timely feedback to enable continuous improvement.
* Investment in developing impact domains as part of the launch of Global Sisters provided clarity and supported prioritisation of activities.
* Engagement with their customers (Sisters) to develop and refine their OIM has provided Global Sisters with a strong evidence-base for their impact domains and confidence to scale.
* Global Sisters have been careful to ensure that their ambitions for scale did not adversely impact their ability to continue to make an impact for Sisters.
* Using simple OIM technology systems in the initial organisational development and implementation phases would have allowed Global Sisters to be clearer on what OIM technology-based tools are most appropriate for the complexity of their programs and the way they want to measure and report their outcomes.
* Recognising that many of the traditional approaches to OIM don’t reflect diverse female perspectives, Global Sisters seeks to provide accessible reporting. This supports accountability and transparency.

# About Global Sisters

Global Sisters provides women opportunities to improve their financial situation through micro business. By providing accessible pathways and support to entrepreneurship, Global Sisters aims to support participants (called Sisters) to be self-employed and financially resilient.

The not-for-profit organisation works with women across Australia, including single mothers and women over 50 who are unemployed or under-employed due to systemic and structural barriers. They support Sisters through all stages of business development – from business ideation to business growth.

The organisation was officially launched in 2016 and offers a number of programs at no charge to Sisters. Programs are designed around a Sister Roadmap.

Sisters can enter the program at any stage of business and access the programs and tools that they need at that point in time including business education, business coaching, microfinance, and digital sales and marketing support via The Marketplace.

## Sister Roadmap

#### Business Foundations (Educate)

Pre-idea: “I’m interested to see if business is something I would like to explore”

Idea: “I have found a business solution to my customers’ problem – and this idea could really work!”

#### Incubate

Set-up: “My idea has been further developed and I am ready to make some sales”

Launch: “I have my first 10 customers, I have chosen a business model and I know I can make a profit”

#### Accelerate

Early start-up and Late start-up: “My business is on the pathway to breaking even, access to experts and networks will help me achieve my goals”

#### Scaling

Growth: “I’m the proud owner of a profitable business that’s helping me achieve my goals”

# Measuring impact

Global Sisters has developed a Social Impact Platform that identifies and measures their impact across the six domains below.

### Business Acumen

Sisters have established and embedded strong business foundations through the enhancement of knowledge, skills and networks.

### Enterprise

Sisters develop the business, moving forward in business stages with the ultimate goal being income generation and a sustainable business.

### Financial Resilience

Sisters have strengthened financial resilience.

### Empowerment

Sisters see themselves as a real businesswoman, with dignity, opportunity, freedom and choice.

### Influence

Sisters actively create connection, networks and opportunities with and for others. Their growing leadership capability has a positive ripple effect on their family and community.

### Connection

Sisters belong to a community of like-minded women. They are stronger with others and lift each other up. They connect with local and national business opportunities, network and support.

Each year Global Sisters provide reporting on their activity and impact through the [Global Sisters Impact Report online portal. This reports on the various stages of their Global Sisters Impact Roadmap](https://impact.globalsisters.org/).

## The Global Sisters Impact Roadmap

Stages 1 to 4 - Direct Sister Impact: “Beat the odds”
Directly supporting women to run micro businesses and become financially resilient that that income. Global Sisters provides community and connection through:
• Business education
• Coaching and pro-bono services
• Microfinance, and
• Sales and marketing.
Stage 1: Economic participation and job pathway is measured against Domain 1 – Business acumen and Domain 6 – Connection, as they make starting a business and self-employment possible.
Stage 2: Job creation is measured against Domain 2 – Enterprise, which is required to start generating income through a micro-business.
Stage 3: Sustaining a job and income is measured against Domain 3 - Financial resilience.
Stage 4: Welfare and other dependence is reduced or eliminated is also measured against Domain 3 – Financial resilience, with a view of increasing income and financial independence.
Stages 5 to 7 – Systems change: “Change the odds”
Sustaining and leveraging business income to change women’s long-term economic security through welfare system reform, elevating women’s microbusiness, and women’s economic security pathways through affordable housing finance, super and investments, financial planning, and business loans and insurance.
Stage 5: Women’s financial inclusion and assets is measured against Domain 4 – Empowerment, and Domain 3 – Financial resilience, where increased income is a leverage for long-term economic security.
Stage 6: Employ others is measured against Domain 5 – Influence arising from business growth and the ability to provide employment to others.
Stage 7: Long-term economic security and macro ripple effect is measured against Domain 3 – Financial resilience, Domain 4 – Empowerment, and Domain 5 - Influence when a Sister has sufficient income, adequate super and savings, and secure housing. 
Macro ripple effect benefits include:
• Reduction in family and child poverty
• Prevention of old age homelessness
• Ability to get out and stay out of domestic violence, and
• Improved mental health and wellbeing outcomes.


Source: Global Sisters 2021 Social Impact Report

# A plan for growth

Global Sisters launched operations in 2016 and the focus of the first three years of operation was on developing and refining the support for Sisters. Since 2019, there has been a focus on increasing the impact of Global Sisters through scaling the program, predominantly through digital transformation to enable Sisters to access the program from anywhere in Australia.

The Global Sisters 5 Year Scale Strategy detailed the organisation’s plan for scaling activities through:

* increasing Sister impact
* facilitating systems change
* supporting the organisation’s financial sustainability and governance.

The Strategy sets out a number of goals regarding the increased Sister impact of scale.

## Global Sisters Timeline

# Figure shows a timeline from 2016 to 2022 and beyond. The time from the start to mid 2019 is a program development and & evolution phase, and the period after, a program scale phase. The timeline begins in 2016 when Global Sisters was launched, followed by the Global Sisters purpose and impact framework being developed with sisters. In mid 2017, the first impact report is released, and Global Sisters is operating successfully in 5 locations, with 755 Sisters being supported in 2018. The beginning of 2019 starts with planning for scale and ends with ends with the commencement of digital program delivery. In 2020, the five-year scale strategy was developed and implemented at a national level, and ended with the Launch of the online marketplace to support Sisters' access to the online market. In mid 2021 5,384 Sisters were being supported.

## Global Sisters Impact Goals

From 2020 to 2025, the Global Sisters 5 Year Scale Strategy shows:

* Sisters impacted: from 755 to 43,000 Sisters
* Earning Income: from $238 to $17,000
* Online Community: from 2,300 to 100,000 Sisters
* Businesses Selling: from 217 to 15,000 businesses.

The digital transformation process involved the automation of systems and processes to transition from a mainly place-based service to a full roadmap of programs, tools and customer experience in an online environment. At the same time, Global Sisters also undertook a review of their OIM and, as a result, implemented their new Measurement, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Framework. One of the key areas of focus of the Framework was identifying how Global Sisters would measure their impact, and ensuring that the processes for collecting data on the experience and outcomes for Sisters was appropriate to their new online program delivery.

# Unlocking opportunities through lockdown

At the same time that Global Sisters launched their transition to digital service delivery, Australia was impacted by lockdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This saw women being disproportionally impacted by job losses or removal from the workforce, increased caring responsibilities with schools and other services shut down, and increased rates of domestic violence.[[1]](#footnote-1)

To support women seeking to increase their financial resilience, Global Sisters accelerated their digital transformation program to enable women all over Australia to access their programs and support. This saw the number of Sisters supported by the program grow more than threefold in 2020.

Limited or non-existent face-to-face retail opportunities during the 2020-21 lockdown periods also posed a significant challenge for Sisters’ businesses, many of whom traded through farmers markets or other in-person retail channels. As a result, Global Sisters launched the Global Sisters Marketplace in November 2020. The Marketplace is the first online sales portal in Australia to support women-led micro businesses.

Within a year, the Marketplace had 315 Sisters selling and had generated almost $125,000 in sales.

## Number of Sisters supported by Global Sisters

Between 2019 and 2020, the number of Sisters grew by 222 per cent, going from 1,236 to 3,975 Sisters.
Between 2020 and 2021, the number of Sisters grew by 35 per cent, going from 3,975 to 5,384 Sisters.


# Using Outcome and Impact Measurement to support scale

Global Sisters’ OIM activities supported their focus on scaling their programs and impact through providing:

### Confidence to scale

Global Sisters’ OIM has been a focus for the organisation since it launched in 2016. This has allowed Global Sisters to demonstrate progress against their six impact domains.

This evidence of impact allowed Global Sisters to plan for scale with confidence that their program was appropriate and effective.

### Timely feedback for continuous improvement

The implementation of Global Sisters’ Measurement, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Framework included the integration of rapid evaluation. This provided timely insight into which elements of the digital Global Sisters program were working (and what wasn’t) and supported a dynamic approach to continuous improvement.

This was particularly valuable within the condensed timeframe of the digital transformation project as Global Sisters attempted to meet the growing demand for the program as a result of COVID-19.

### Evidence for development of new initiatives

Impact data collected against the Financial Resilience domain helped identify the need for Sisters to access a suite of appropriate, affordable and accessible financial products and services.

This led to Global Sisters developing a Systems Change Strategy and working with Ecstra to build out a roadmap of financial products and services designed with women’s voices front and centre.

### Insight into customer experience

Hearing from Sisters is a key element of Global Sisters’ OIM. This has provided invaluable insight into Sisters’ experience of the program, supporting Global Sisters to evolve their model as they scale up.

For example, by mapping Sisters’ journeys through the program, Global Sisters identified that Sisters were accessing programs and support at different points in their business’ development rather than going through the program in a particular sequence. This helped inform Global Sisters’ digital transformation and ensure that the program design corresponds to the way Sisters use the program.

# Outcome and Impact Measurement learnings for the sector

Global Sisters is now in their sixth year of operation and has successfully commenced their journey to achieving scale and helping to support 43,000 Sisters by 2025. Reflecting on their learnings regarding OIM, Global Sisters has five key pieces of advice for other impact organisations.

### Be clear on the impact you want to make and stick to it

Global Sisters spent a considerable amount of time and effort during their start-up phase identifying their impact domains. This allowed them to identify which activities they should focus on to facilitate the outcomes they wanted for Sisters.

Clearly defined impact domains also helped Global Sisters to develop their OIM Framework to ensure that they had the appropriate indicators for their intended outcomes.

Global Sisters management said “The most important thing is just to be super clear on the impact that you want to create. It sounds so simple, but if you are crystal clear on what you want to achieve, then then you just work backwards from that.”

### Involve your customers from the beginning

Engagement with Sisters has been at the heart of the development and continual refinement of Global Sisters’ OIM. This has allowed Global Sisters to be confident in their impact domains, as they reflect the feedback of Sisters on the impact that the support provided by Global Sisters has on their lives and the lives of their family and community.

Sisters’ feedback has also been vital in supporting the growth of Global Sisters. By seeking regular feedback from Sisters on new initiatives through rapid evaluations, Global Sisters has been able to quickly identify learnings and implement appropriate continuous improvement initiatives to support the quality of their programs.

Global Sisters management said “In the very early days we engaged with our Sisters to truly understand what changes they wanted to see in their own lives and developed our impact domains off the back of that.”

### Balance your ability to make impact and your ambitions for scale

As a social impact organisation, Global Sisters is passionate about providing opportunities for as many women as possible to create their own economic future. However, they have been very cautious to avoid the potential for ambitions of scale to reduce the quality of their programs and therefore their ability to impact Sisters’ lives.

This cautious approach to scale is demonstrated through Global Sisters’ initial focus on the development and evolution of the programs and ensuring that they were confident in their ability to affect their intended impact prior to commencing strategic planning for scale.

Global Sisters management said “We’ve always had conversations around trying to get the balance right between scale and impact. While it’s important to us to scale we never wanted to do that at the expense of deep and lasting impact.”

### Learn what you want to measure before you invest in costly technology-based Outcome and Impact Measurement tools

While Global Sisters was clear on their outcome measures, it has taken several years to develop an understanding of which OIM tools are most appropriate to help them measure and report on their outcomes.

Based on their experience, Global Sisters suggests that other impact organisations keep their initial OIM system simple and refine this approach over time. This will provide an opportunity to learn what support is needed and avoid investment in OIM tools or systems that may not provide the required support or insight.

Global Sisters management said “Keep it really, really simple. It doesn’t matter if your measures aren’t perfect, just keep tracking over time, align to your original purpose and mission, and you’ll be right.”

### Challenge the status quo

Global Sisters recognises that many of the traditional approaches to measuring and reporting social impact don’t reflect diverse female perspectives relevant to the outcomes that Global Sisters are aiming to achieve. Global Sisters pushes against embedded beliefs that traditional methods and overly intellectual language to communicate findings are indicators of rigour, compared to more accessible approaches. By using visual and interactive reporting, Global Sisters aims to ensure that all stakeholders, including Sisters, can make sense of their key impact insights, which improves accountability and the likelihood of learnings being engaged with and utilised by both internal and external stakeholders.

Global Sisters’ online Social Impact Platform provides its audience with key data and insights, allowing users to interact with reporting dynamically. This reflects Global Sisters’ commitment to being transparent on the impact they are trying to achieve for Sisters. Aligning data collection with key phases in a Sister’s journey improved data quality and allowed for key outcomes of interest to be highlighted within reporting.

By having reporting available online, Global Sisters can provide timely updates on their impact and can utilise their strong visual identity and various multimedia formats such as video and infographics to engage their OIM audience. Tying everything together is a focus on democratising reporting by providing a platform for Sisters to share their journeys and experience. This helps create a personal connection and provides a depth of insight that would not be possible using quantitative data alone.

For more information on Global Sisters visit [globalsisters.org](https://globalsisters.org/) and to find out more about the impact the program is having view the [Global Sisters Social Impact Platform](https://impact.globalsisters.org/).

This case study part of a series of case studies following Global Sisters’ approach to outcome and impact measurement (OIM) and how they use it OIM to support growth and scale.

The case studies are funded by the Department of Social Services to provide information to the social impact investing sector to better understand, define, measure and communicate their non-financial social outcomes and impact.

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1. Global Sisters (n.d) The role of Global Sisters in the post pandemic recovery. Available at

   impact.globalsisters.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/GS210413-Post-Pandemic-Recovery-Paper.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)