



Wilton Park



Report

**Women's Economic Empowerment: Stimulating
Renewed Global Momentum and Driving Long-
Lasting Change**

Monday 27 – Wednesday 29 March 2023 | WP3201

In association with:



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



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Why we met

In the context of concerted efforts to roll back on women's and girls' rights and the disproportionate impact of COVID, conflict and the climate crisis, there is a need for a concerted, collective effort on, for and with women and girls. This conference aimed to stimulate renewed global momentum to drive long lasting improvement to women's economic empowerment. It took stock of recent geopolitical changes, including the COVID-19 crises, establishing a coordinated and effective effort to enhance women's economic empowerment. The norms underpinning gendered outcomes can be 'sticky' or resistant to change, particularly when reinforced through social institutions. Progress is often nonlinear, and subject to backlash and reversals. In 2022 the [World Economic Forum](#) found the global 'Economic Participation and Opportunity' gender gap to be 39.7% - which, at the current rate of progress, will take 151 years to close - representing multiple generations to parity. Concerted, coordinated international effort is needed therefore to allow women to fulfil their right to decent work.

The conference explored what works to support women at different life stages, and revisited the [Seven Proven and Promising Drivers to Expand Women's Economic Opportunities](#) identified by the 2016 UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment:

- 1) Tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models;
- 2) Ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations;
- 3) Recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid work and care;
- 4) Building assets – digital, financial and property;
- 5) Changing business culture and practice;
- 6) Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement;
- 7) Strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation;

This was an opportunity to check in on global progress on these drivers halfway between the Panel and the 2030 ambition for the SDGs.

“Women’s economic empowerment is central to realising women’s rights, reducing poverty, and achieving gender equality across the globe. When a woman’s earnings increase and become more stable, other areas of her life also improve. She can afford health care, pay her children’s school fees, and she is more likely to play a leadership role in her community.”

**Alicia Herbert, UK
Gender Envoy**

The need for action

On 8th April the FCDO released their [International Women and Girl’s Strategy](#) to address the UK government’s three thematic priorities of educating girls, empowering women and girls and championing their health and rights, and ending gender-based violence. These areas face the most acute challenges, have the greatest potential gains, and are where we have greatest experience and expertise to act.

Today women earn less and have fewer workers’ rights. They have smaller businesses, fewer assets and lower productivity. They do three times more care and domestic work than men. Some groups of women are subject to even greater discrimination and economic disadvantage. These include women with disabilities, indigenous women, rural women, women raising children on their own, migrant or ethnic minorities and sexual and gender minorities.

There is a cost of living crisis being experienced globally, and common advice is tighter monetary policy and less broad based social assistance. Women are hit hardest by this, as they are the most vulnerable. Russia’s war in Ukraine has driven food prices up and threatened energy availability, and Covid-19 put a magnifying glass on women’s troubles. These crises, alongside urgent climate issues, distract from the issues of women’s economic empowerment, as there seems to always be something ‘more urgent’, and taking a higher priority in budget allocations. But this is the wrong way round to look at the issues – women’s economic empowerment is not something to address after these crises, it’s something we need to drive *in order to* address these crises: empowering women is good for growth; smooths out income inequality; women on financial institutions’ boards make the financial system more resilient; economies become more resilient to shocks as economies are more diversified when more women are in the labour force.

We now need to look closer at the care economy and how it can fit in the green economy. Currently only 28% of green jobs are held by women – we need to shift this.

Evidence shows women’s leadership and empowerment can drive sustainable, resilient and inclusive development.

- 1) We need to value women’s equality and economic empowerment as a goal in itself – this needs leadership from the top, to make every single person take this seriously, or gender mainstreaming will not happen. We need to connect the dots between areas of development and the gender implications.
- 2) According to recent evidence from the Missing Billion team, 18% of the world’s 4 billion women have disabilities – that means 700 million women.
- 3) Prevalence of disability is higher in women than men by 18% to 14%.

We know that if people with disabilities are included in economic empowerment, the benefits can be felt on numerous levels, including contributing to between 3-7% of GDP if they are given economic opportunities¹. Supporting women with disabilities into work challenges ableism. It lifts households out of poverty, and it helps the overall growth and resilience of economies.

¹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_119305.pdf

“Economic empowerment is the ability to earn and control an income – metrics must capture paid and unpaid work, and the quality of this work. Shift from just achievements of what is earned and owned, but also the power and decision making process over how these are used. Controlling means increased saving and other financial services (capital and insurance) and control over assets (tractor, tech) and subjective wellbeing (agency) decision making power, autonomy and self-efficacy.”

Gates Foundation definition

Defining the problem

To make progress on women’s economic empowerment, we must first agree a definition of what this involves, and what achieving our goal would look like – a ‘North Star’ to navigate towards and measure our progress against. We need to be rowing in the same direction. Conceptual clarity should include defining the key entry points and structural changes required to achieve our North Star.

There is a tension, however, in how advocates visualise their ambitions. The purpose of our goal can be expressed as a fundamental right, as a necessity for social and feminist justice, or as a requirement for sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction. Using the terms ‘Women’s Economic Justice’ or ‘Social Feminist Justice’ may be more political, but incorporate the structural change required. Some participants reported often flexing the case for change and framing of the problem to suit different audiences - for example, in Sahelian countries couching women’s economic empowerment in terms of their potential for a ‘demographic dividend’ has proved successful. To achieve change we will need to translate these issues to those who hold financial and societal power, in their language, bringing them solutions they can implement.

Either way, it is hard to have a clear message when there are so many parts of the problem, with the High Level Panel’s 7 Drivers still not seen as enough – with the wider economic enabling environment, and health suggested as missing. Furthermore, this is not just a development issue - these issues are relevant everywhere, to everyone. We hear about the debate reopening for women’s rights to vote and to go to school and work. This means we must be more disruptive to see change as we work against this political tide.

Tension can also appear between focusing on gender and broadening the discussion to wider inclusion issues. This tension is a misdirection. We cannot put women into a homogenous group together, nor can we put people with disabilities into one group together and we cannot continue to lump individuals homogeneously into group headings of “marginalised” or “vulnerable”. There is diversity within diversity, and we are missing the very nuances of individualism and identity when we seek to generalise for the purposes of simplification. The Government of Canada adopted a feminist foreign policy 8 years ago, and over this time they have recognised the need for including greater emphasis on intersectionality. The implication of true intersectionality is profound, and is making some uncomfortable and worry that it dilutes the emphasis on women and girls. This is a healthy debate as part of the policy evolution, but it is challenging. Ultimately the Human Rights based approach of ‘Leave No One Behind’ promotes affirmative action, so in line with this, actors should aim to be gender transformative with indicators to show that the most marginalised are being reached.

Alongside a broadly agreed definition, we need a broadly consistent set of indicators and measurement methods to track progress. The FCDO Work and Opportunities for Women produced for this conference [an evidence review of progress since the UN High-Level Panel in 2016](#) on each of the 7 drivers of transformation of women’s economic empowerment. This found a need for clearer comparable drivers to track relative progress on each.

Progress since the UN High-Level Panel

Did we see sufficient momentum?

Since 2016 there have been some successes we should reflect on and celebrate, including seeing women's economic empowerment rocket up the agenda of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs). Ten years ago, gender was not seen as relevant to their work, and over last five years DFIs and MDBs have moved from looking at gender only through a narrow, risk lens, towards baking gender into impact scores and looking at it more systematically across the investment landscape. This has been done through careful thinking of internal incentives and governance approaches, including incorporating legal levers into agreements and potential incentives of more favourable interest rates and financial returns based on gender inclusion. Now the World Bank Group is developing a Gender Strategy Update 2024 -2030.

We have seen growing evidence that 'cash +' social protection interventions work, and they are being increasingly rolled out, and broader inclusion programmes are being implemented across different sectors. Women's entrepreneurship and businesses are getting more, targeted support and there are a number of impressive corporate procurement strategies promoting women businesses. Financial inclusion efforts, measured as access to bank accounts, have effectively mobilised people and money towards this goal.

Within the private sector, more businesses, especially multinationals, recognise that gender is not a separate issue from good business practice. Inflation has strengthened the business case that we need 100% of the potential workforce empowered to meet their potential. We have seen some positive impacts for women with disabilities from investments in Business and Disability networks to strengthen inclusion across different market sectors. Partnerships with large private sector organisations, such as CISCO and Diageo, have enabled civil society actors to embed disability inclusion into recruitment, hiring and training packages. However, while everything a business does should address environmental, social, and governance issues, typically businesses focus most on the environmental, and least on the social. Further, some of these initiatives may miss the point. They are only effective where people can access the formal sector and very often, women, especially those with disabilities, work in the informal sector if they are in work and are often paid low wages and experience greater job instability.

Despite the progress that has been made, we are not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 targets on women's economic empowerment – indeed, only 5% of all SDG goals are on target, and on the current trajectory we won't reach gender equality until 2108. Too often 'gender lens investments' are too small to shift the dial and are used for 'pinkwashing' PR campaigns rather than to see business-wide changes in practices.

Progress in women's human capital has not translated into economic opportunities, assets and services, or voice and agency. Women in low income and fragile and conflict affected countries continue to be disproportionately deprived of basic services or opportunities.

We must compare where we have made progress, and where we have stalled. Have we improved the lot for women in 'sexy' jobs, without paying enough attention to those in 'dirty' jobs? Have we focused too much on the public sphere not on the home?

Modern Slavery and Gender Based Violence are addressed more than in the past, but a lot of the issues are much further down the supply chain and responsibility is therefore murky. [BBC Panorama](#) recently revealed that women working on plantations producing tea for PG Tips and Lipton are pressured to have sex with their bosses in return for work. This isn't a unique case – this happens much wider. Addressing these issues head on at the front line takes more than just the private sector.

In 2018, Argentina's Presidency mainstreamed gender in the G20, but we have since seen the issue falling off the agenda. We now need better incentives and accountability for leaders to *actively* mainstream and therefore address gender head on.

Economic growth is key to offering opportunities for women's economic empowerment, but without accompanying social and political efforts growth will not lift all boats. For example, in Pakistan, as families get richer, it has become a cultural status symbol for women to show they don't *need* to work any more – so we can't rely on growth alone.

Impact of the pandemic

UN Women and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) published a [report on Private Sector Response and Recovery Measures for Gender Equality amid COVID-19](#), which showed that gender considerations were not systematically addressed by businesses – gender was often an after thought in their pandemic response. During the pandemic we saw the Gender Pay Gap increase, women lose their jobs at higher rates than men, and women's care burdens increase. This was in part due to women disproportionately being in unstable jobs, outside of the formal sector.

We know from previous responses to economic downturn, that the economic inclusion of people with disabilities can go backwards as companies experience lay-offs or have to deprioritise inclusions efforts due to competing pressures. Without a concerted effort, women with disabilities will continue to be further left behind as economies recover from the acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, there were positive stories of innovative interventions, for example in Bangladesh women were paid digitally by the Government during the pandemic to make up for lost earnings. COVID-19 has made flexible working more popular, which supports the empowerment of women who can't travel safely or where it is not socially condoned.

The rollback

Alongside the challenges prompted by the pandemic, the context of this conference was the increasing momentum behind systematic attempts to roll back on women's and girls' rights. This has included limiting access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, condoning violence against women and girls, and preventing equal access to skills, services, resources and jobs. Andrew Tate's influence amongst young people in the UK, for example, shows how much this is everybody's issue. We need to engage men along every stage of this journey as allies and build a coalition to address this together.

The Supreme Court in the US overturning the Row vs. Wade judgement proved that this rollback is not just an issue in lower income countries. Despite this decision being extremely unpopular, it proved the effectiveness of decades long, well-funded, strategic and dedicated campaigns. We need to be able to match this, and need strong leadership, including from businesses, driving the pushback too. We need to reaffirm the fundamental principles of our social contract – the basic and inalienable rights that we layer our work on top of. This is proving difficult in multilateral negotiations, where for example, the principle of equal pay for work of equal value nearly fell from the conclusions of the latest Commission on the Status of Women communique, despite the gender wage gap remaining stubborn internationally.

The backlash does not just come from men, it also comes from women. We must ask ourselves *why* we can't reach these parts of the population who are pushing the rollback to change mindsets. Perhaps part of the issue is that the traditional approach of defining our ambitions on women's economic empowerment are not exposing or addressing the tension points and pushback the way we need, and to rectify this we need to be more disruptive – responsive, reactive, and inclusive.

Tools for increasing gender parity and economic inclusion

The overriding message for solutions is the need for a comprehensive approach. We have learnt that it is impossible to invest in the drivers of economic empowerment in isolation. We know that we cannot address the barriers facing women without addressing the wider issues of gender-based violence, attitudinal barriers and access to affordable and inclusive health care, assistive devices and social protection systems.

Existing best practice to drive women's economic empowerment, identified by a report commissioned by the [FCDO on the High Level Drivers](#) includes:

- Working with children and adolescents on shifting harmful social norms and engaging male leaders and partners in interventions.
- Supporting quality and affordable care services that can reduce and redistribute the heavy and unequal unpaid care work, increase entrepreneurship, reduce stress and increase incomes and wellbeing for women and their families.
- And finally, designing financial products that give women greater control and protect them from others' demands, such as mobile payments and direct deposits.

Multi-pronged approaches help advance women's economic empowerment, including information, Cash Plus economic inclusion programmes (financial inclusion, mentoring, socio-economic skills), Care (childcare incentive fund, care economy), Community services and outreach (social workers, community health workers and other community workers; local religious and cultural leaders) and social norms and mindsets.

Key tools discussed were:

Education and training

Efforts to increase women and girls' access to education have been substantial and seen many successes. Better educated women are marrying more educated men, later, and marrying less first cousins. They are spending more time outside the home, and socialising more, but this is not yet translating into labour participation.

Notable approaches include using education projects and support to make schools a safe place for girls to learn life skills and reproductive rights. This has been shown to make a huge difference to their economic empowerment. Adolescent girls empowerment programmes are showing great results providing resilience in fragile and conflict affected states, and delivering sustained improvements in earnings. Digital platforms have offered education, training and skills to those who are not getting this face to face.

Education and skills however have proved necessary, but not sufficient for tackling issues, with education too often just taking women to the next barrier – for example, in Pakistan 50% of graduates are women, but only 10% end up in the work force. In MENA women are highly educated, including in STEM, but these women are outside of the paid labour force – hence the investments going into STEM are not seeing returns.

Roadblocks in the school to work transition arise from:

- **Skills mismatch:** When curriculums are not competency based the courses do not prepare students sufficiently to meet the demands of the labour market, so their aspirations are not met.
- **Schooling not aimed at preparing students for work but for unpaid care:** In some cultures, educated women are seen to make better homemakers and mothers, and that's the purpose of the investments in their education.
- **Women need to do more to prove themselves to employers:** In Asia, female technical and vocational training graduates report having to do unpaid internships to prove themselves before getting longer term contracts more often than male counterparts.

- **Social norms:** If we educate and train women, but do not address the norms that mean women must prioritise marriage and family life above this, we will see no change. 40% women in Uganda are married before the age of 18, often due to pressure from parents. This limits the ability of women to pursue personal career dreams.
- **Timing:** Other lifecycle transitions that overlap with this time include starting a family, and having limited finances, which together disrupt the career plans of young women.

Access to decent jobs

Access to decent jobs in safe workplaces is limited, and this needs a multipronged approach to change. The first, clear barrier is a lack of appropriate jobs which comes from low economic growth in regions with high population growth, compounded by a misalignment of this jobs supply with demand. For example, in South Asia (other than Bangladesh) we see that female labour force participation is not where growth would suggest. Even short distances between workplaces and homes can prove barriers, and better transport and flexible working options could help overcome this. Multiple projects have shown that there **is** space for local negotiation here. Home working options can be seen to impinge on women's rights as much as support them, though, with some concerned that it can 'keep women in the household'. Furthermore, domestic violence can increase with women working from home.

For those who can travel, workplaces themselves can prove inaccessible or unsafe, especially for those with disabilities. A lack of reasonable workplace adjustments, including the availability of personal assistants, reduces the opportunities for women with disabilities to engage in meaningful work. The FCDO funded Sightsavers to produce a '[Disability Confident Employers toolkit](#)' to help employers, property managers and HR professionals build inclusive workplaces that enable everyone to thrive.

We all need a world of work free from violence and harassment. The [Experiences of violence and harassment at work survey](#) from ILO showed that young people and migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the workplace, and everybody is found to be at risk of psychological violence.

Part of the decent work agenda also needs to be closing the gender pay gap. The Equal Pay International Coalition led by the ILO, UN Women and OECD is one international, multi-sector coalition aiming to make equal pay for work of equal value a reality across all countries and sectors.

Care

Care is the most precious public good that humanity has in its hands, and it is essential to the transition to a green economy. The closure of schools and care facilities during the pandemic highlighted the impact of these responsibilities on women's economic opportunities across all corners of the globe, and this created a moment for change. Women spend more hours on unpaid care work than men in every single country in the world.

Both feminist justice and care are common goods that require a rethinking of fiscal priorities, to devote more of national budgets to the care economy. The ILO launched a technical assistance and advocacy tool for advocating for care policies - the [Care policy investment simulator](#) - based on macroeconomic calculations of the investment required in 4 care policy areas and the related employment and gender equality benefits for 82 countries. This demonstrates the employment benefits, investment return in terms of taxes and impact on the gender pay gap these investments would result in. Alongside this, the OECD has a large [family database](#) - an interactive tool that allows users to analyse how wages, taxes and social benefits affect the income of different family types across OECD countries.

The Irish Government's upcoming referendum in November 2023 on potentially referencing the value of care in the Constitution could prove a model for change for other countries to follow. Work is underway to build a coalition of actors in support of women's economic empowerment ahead of the vote. These conversations are using care as a way to unlock acknowledgement of the wider inequality the most vulnerable women face. Migrant women are often hit hardest by pressures to decrease the cost and therefore pay associated with care work, as a lot of caring staffing in Ireland are from low income countries. Women's workers rights, migrants rights, and cultural allocation of care duties are now all issues falling under the unifying campaign for care.

There is a tension worth noting though, between those who see the marketisation and privatisation of care work as leading to lower value being ascribed to this work, and a race to the bottom for wages and training; and those who emphasise that care marketisation and professionalisation brings dignity to care work, and ensures it is at least paid.

Lower income countries have less fiscal space for this agenda, and we know countries in Africa are not prioritising care in the top long term objectives, but maternity and paternity rights should be a priority. Ultimately economic ministries need to shift from seeing care primarily as a cost, to an investment in human capital capable of driving growth. Recognising, redistributing and rewarding care work including through care cooperatives is needed. Initiatives showing models for success include rural creches in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for women farmers which are cooperatively managed and have shown increased participation in the paid workforce from both men and women, improved childhood development, and increased earnings.

Finance

The Alison Rose [Review](#) identified 6 key life moments where women fall behind men financially. These have only been applied to developed countries so far, but there's good reason to expect a heightened penalty for those with intersecting disadvantages including disabilities and / or in development settings. The impact is cumulative. These moments are:

1. **Growing up, studying and requalifying:** Girls are less likely to go to school, to do STEM subjects, and female apprentices are less well paid than men because of the sectors they choose to go into.
2. **Entering and re-entering the workplace:** At the point of entry women are already earning less and working fewer hours. Women work disproportionately in informal sector.
3. **Relationships:** 1 in 5 girls globally are married as children which comes with huge social and economic costs. Marriage locks women into financial dependence, where men can control every aspect of women's lives.
4. **Becoming a mother and/or carer:** Women are more likely to take on primary carer responsibilities for relatives.

5. **Later life planning and entering retirement:** 75% of people earning below auto-enrolment pension threshold in UK are women. By the time of retirement they have 20% the value of men's pensions; Women are left either reliant on family and / or continuing to work past retirement age.
6. **Health deterioration:** Women continue to play the care function very late into life.

These are the moments that interventions should be structured around to maximise impact and resilience. We also may consider a 7th life moment - the inter-generational impact of financial inequality, where girls suffer from the lower starting point of their mother, deepening the cycle of poverty.

Promoting financial inclusion is the first step in empowering women economically. However, many women, particularly in sectors like agriculture, face barriers due to high ticket prices set by Development Finance Institutions (DFIs). Tackling these barriers is key to unlocking women's earning potential. Financial literacy is also a fundamental building block. Equipping women with knowledge about the returns associated with different trades and investments can shift their behaviour towards making informed financial decisions. This enables them to choose economically viable activities and investments.

Social protection

Social protection encompasses four main groups of interventions:

- **Social assistance/social safety nets:** These are non-contributory schemes that can take the form of cash transfers, in-kind assistance, asset transfers, and public work programmes aimed at income generation, or waivers and subsidies.
- **Social insurance:** These schemes require contributions and often provide benefits like pensions and social security.
- **Labour market policies:** These include skills training and job placement programmes to facilitate women's access to employment opportunities.
- **Social care services:** These services, such as childcare and eldercare, play a crucial role in enabling women to participate in the workforce.

Social protection has gained prominence across governments, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, where it became a primary tool to mitigate food insecurity and poverty. The World Bank has significantly expanded its social protection portfolio, indicating its continued relevance in addressing ongoing economic challenges like climate issues, conflicts such as Ukraine, and inflation. Although the pandemic represented a global crisis, the level of support for care and social protection should not revert to pre-pandemic, but instead reflect the ongoing need for comprehensive social protection.

It is essential to design social protection programmes that maximise benefits for both men and women. To overcome the challenge of constrained fiscal resources, finance ministers must re-prioritise by looking at the bigger picture, to enhance women's productivity, income, savings, and overall economic growth. Focusing on a narrative shift from "Protection to Production" can enable this change, with demonstrated benefits for female-headed households.

Social protection plays a significant role in reducing stress related to poverty. Studies, such as those by CGD, explore the impacts of social protection on economic outcomes and cost-benefit analysis. Combining public work programmes with childcare can enhance the welfare of beneficiaries, showing that innovative approaches are necessary. To reach those in informal sectors, social protection programmes should ideally be near-universal or universal in nature. However, there are specific challenges in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS). In these settings, risks of misappropriation can increase violence. Innovations in digital transfers can make it easier for women to navigate and use these resources for their intended purposes. Social protection can also encourage and safeguard climate-friendly practices.

However, women with disabilities face additional costs and barriers to participation. Assistive devices and technology are often prohibitively expensive, making it challenging for them to achieve independence and engage in the workforce. Some social protection systems can be incompatible with work, forcing women with disabilities to choose between employment and social protection support, especially if they have families. Gender issues can be exacerbated by social insurance programmes tied to labour market participation. Investment in childcare can lead to significant benefits, as women are often overburdened.

Cash Plus programmes offer a dynamic strategy for women's economic empowerment by providing opportunities, autonomy, and the means to challenge stereotypes.

- **BRAC Graduation Programme:** The BRAC Graduation Programme serves as a valuable model, offering a ladder out of poverty. This programme upended the negative stereotype of the "lazy social welfare recipient" showing that the poorest of the poor can experience sustained income improvements when provided with the right opportunities.
- **Agency over Aid:** Women have shown a remarkable willingness to choose employment opportunities over cash transfers, even when it means accepting a 30 percent reduction in pay. This choice reflects the agency and self-sufficiency that comes with having a job, which holds great value for women.
- **Bypassing macro barriers in humanitarian settings:** Cash transfers can play a vital role in circumventing macro-level barriers, especially in humanitarian settings. This approach ensures that assistance reaches those in need efficiently and effectively.
- **Overcoming geographic barriers:** Geographic barriers, such as training programmes being provided outside of villages, can hinder women's access to opportunities. In Pakistan, an inspiring solution was found through the provision of women-only transport services. This innovation significantly increased the uptake of training programmes by addressing logistical challenges.

Men and boys

In the pursuit of women's economic empowerment, the active engagement of men is critical to addressing harmful gender norms and preventing gender-based violence (GBV).

1. **Reducing risky behaviour through education:** One approach involves addressing these issues within social settings, such as soccer clubs, where group discussions on GBV can be fruitful if participants have positive associations with the activity and let their guard down.

2. **Understanding the lifecycle and trigger points:** A comprehensive strategy involves mapping the lifecycle of a girl growing up and identifying the ‘trigger points’ for social protection. Simultaneously, it is imperative to consider the roles and needs of men and boys in this journey. Unemployment among young men can lead to various social problems. A lack of economic opportunities increases the risk of difficult behaviours, alcoholism and violence against women. A further trigger point is the widening economic circumstance that separate men and women, as men are more likely to migrate for work in countries where gendered work demands vary. For example, South Africa predominantly employs male miners, while the United Arab Emirates relies on female domestic workers. Recommendations include creating culturally appropriate resources to be disseminated.
3. **Community leadership and inclusivity:** To effectively addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by different groups within the community, it is crucial to involve local leaders in the process. They can play a pivotal role in reaching the most marginalised individuals, including those living with HIV and disabilities.

The active engagement of men and boys is essential to address underlying issues related to gender-based violence, harmful gender norms, and the economic challenges faced by young men. By integrating education, awareness, and community leadership, a more inclusive and effective approach can be achieved in promoting women's economic empowerment.

Macroeconomic policy

Our strategy must include improving the broader market conditions, national budget priorities and underlying macroeconomic assumptions that shape the economies women must navigate. Economic growth, for instance, has the potential to create jobs, and often, these opportunities extend to various demographic groups, including women. However, it is essential to recognise that the rising tide of economic growth does not automatically lift all boats. In many cases, it fails to address the unique challenges faced by women in the workforce.

We also need to address failures in the delivery of public goods, particularly in fragile states, where there is a stark absence of gender-sensitive solutions. By fixing or improving inclusive access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure we can create an environment where women can fully participate in the economy. In fragile states, these public goods become even more critical, as they are essential to ensure the inclusion and economic participation of women.

Addressing intergenerational inequality through a holistic approach

Intergenerational inequality is a complex issue that accumulates over the life course, as extensively explored by [the OECD](#). The challenge lies in bridging the gap between recognising this problem and implementing comprehensive solutions.

One of the key roadblocks encountered is the compartmentalisation of government actions, with various government departments focusing on child welfare, education, and health individually, often operating in silos. Developing a comprehensive policy framework can help to implement strategies that consider the broader impact of government policies on individuals and families across generations. A data-driven approach is essential to understanding the scope of the problem. With empirical evidence, it becomes easier to make a case for collaborative, government-level interventions.

“We need to flip the narrative – women’s economic empowerment isn’t just a way to achieve our macroeconomic growth objectives, macroeconomic tools need to be used as a tool for achieving WEE.”

A commitment to addressing intergenerational inequality requires strong long-term leadership and political will. Public awareness and advocacy play a key role in holding political leaders to account and pressuring governments to act holistically. Civil society, community organisations, and individual advocates can be catalysts for change.

Beyond programmes, into power

Moving beyond isolated programmes, emphasis must be placed on a cycle of continuous testing, iteration, and replication that maximises learning and impact. It is imperative to explore the political dimensions of this work, from the household level up. Key considerations include:

- **Advancing women's agency:** Empowering women means advancing their agency both in public spaces and in the home. It is about giving women the tools and opportunities to have better negotiating power within their families and communities. This can translate to more equitable distribution of resources, responsibilities, and opportunities. For example, facilitating women's access to bank accounts in their own name can foster financial autonomy, which in turn empowers women to make decisions about their economic lives.
- **Broadening career horizons:** To encourage women to pursue a wide range of careers, we need to expand the definition of success. Women should not feel compelled to become doctors or lawyers to be considered successful. Encouraging a passion for public service amongst African women for example gets little attention compared to pushing access to STEM fields. Such encouragement however, could equally help break down traditional gender roles and stereotypes.
- **Addressing gender disparities in key institutions:** Key institutions like the Ministries of Finance, African Development Bank (AfDB), and Central Banks have a significant influence on economic policies and resources. However, these institutions are often dominated by men. To address this disparity, it is essential to promote gender diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions, ensuring diverse populations are represented by decision-makers.
- **Reassessing our values as a society:** The undervaluation and devaluation of women's work reproduces inequality. To drive meaningful change and challenge these embedded value systems involves assessing how values are produced and structured on local, national, and global levels.

Navigating the geopolitical context

Demographically, ageing societies face pension crises that can be addressed by integrating women into the labour force, while younger societies require investments in girls' education, reduced fertility rates, and women's participation in the workforce to harness the potential demographic dividend. However, irrespective of demographic dynamics, the time is ripe for all societies to confront gender inequality.

- **Challenges and comprehensive approaches:** Establishing the right regulatory frameworks and creating conducive environments for women's participation is key. Tackling the pressures to invest in visible, high-profile programmes is compounded by the challenge of attribution with multilateral investments.

- **Momentum and backlash:** Historically, there has been momentum for real change, exemplified by key milestones like Beijing '95 and Cairo '94. Private philanthropies have played an influential role in funding and galvanising women's organisations to advocate for their needs in diverse contexts. Movements advocating for gender equality have always faced backlash, including opposition from entities like the Catholic Church. In the 1990s, the organic and decentralised nature of the movement allowed it to mitigate such backlash more effectively.
- **Seeking milestones and aligning forces:** Traditionally, the UN served as a culminating point for advancing women's rights, but this has evolved over time. Creating alternative platforms for representation is vital, particularly in the face of global issues like climate disruptions becoming the "new normal." This includes coalitions of African governments advocating for investments in areas like childcare to drive change.
- **Influence of International Financial Institutions (IFIs):** IFIs, as financial institutions, have stakeholders who are both rich and poor countries. Civil society advocacy with IFIs can sometimes feel unhelpful and unwanted. Such institutions often respond better to the interventions of academics and experts who can provide evidence-based, proven solutions. This is seen as more constructive than confrontational advocacy.
- **Reevaluating value and decision power:** The question of who determines the value attached to women's work and where this decision-making power resides, remains central. Understanding, challenging, and reshaping these dynamics is an ongoing effort.

Working together in a gender-responsive way

There was discussion of the most effective methods to work together to elevate diverse women's voices and build consensus including:

- **Feminist activism:** Feminist activism is characterised by a drive to advocate for the unaddressed issues and be a strong voice for those who are often unheard, which is crucial for progress.
- **Interrogating the existing architecture:** A collective examination of the current global and local structures is necessary to identify where gender equality may be most vulnerable to being sidelined, revealing insights to shape future strategies.
- **Collaborative groups and best practices:** Working together in smaller groups can facilitate the sharing of best practices and create sustained joint efforts. Collective collaboration is essential in achieving constructive and credible outcomes and helps in connecting the international development agenda with domestic agendas.
- **High-level panels and co-convening:** High-level panels offer a platform for setting goals, but translating these into actionable results is often challenging. The proposal to co-convene a '*coalition of the willing*' can build momentum towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5. This effort can be likened to a countdown, promoting a sense of urgency and shared responsibility across all sectors and systems.
- **The inside/outside dynamic:** Exploring the dynamic between insiders and outsiders is crucial in building alliances and bridges within government circles. Historically, external support and pressure have helped movements and coalitions align forces and push for key global initiatives.

- **Women's advocacy organisations:** Women's advocacy organisations, particularly in the global south, play a pivotal role. Strengthening their roles in economic policymaking is essential for achieving gender equality and empowerment.
- **Platform and dialogues:** Achieving gender equality requires change in institutions and norms, contingent upon collective action, innovation, and financing. Creating communication channels between governments and civil society will enable this cohesion.
- **Alliances with the private sector:** Engaging the private sector in initiatives like climate finance programmes is essential. These alliances can drive consideration for gender and women's economic empowerment in their strategies.
- **Data and evidence:** Gender data and diagnostics are instrumental in shaping policy action for gender equality. Data-driven insights are pivotal in unlocking the potential of developing countries. Economists and policymakers should embrace a broader understanding of evidence, including qualitative and granular data, to effectively incorporate the perspectives of Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) in the global south.
- **Climate and gender nexus:** The intersection of climate change and gender issues, particularly in the agricultural sector, requires interdisciplinary conversations. Gender specialists should be actively engaged to ensure that women in off-grid businesses can access energy resources, addressing this pivotal aspect of women's economic empowerment.

Working together in a gender-responsive way encompasses advocacy, collaboration, data-driven insights, and a comprehensive approach to tackle the multifaceted challenges faced by women worldwide.

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