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Empowering Women Can Bring About Development

When women are ensured equal access and equal rights, the entire community benefits, demonstrating exponential growth in education, health, income, and community/political engagement.

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In conjunction with formal work, women perform up to 3 times more unpaid work than men.

Currently, [836 million](#) people are living in extreme poverty, and in developing regions, [one in five people](#) live on less than \$1.25 per day. Despite these staggering numbers, the United Nations' [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) seeks to eradicate poverty by 2030 – this, though, cannot be achieved if we continue doing business as usual and leaving women behind. [Recent studies](#) have found that the economic empowerment of women is fundamental to poverty reduction and a pre-condition for sustainable development, harnessing the potential to significantly alter the course of the 2030 Agenda.

Even though research is strengthening the link between women's economic empowerment and sustainable development, the issue still fails to be prioritized

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by States. The topic of women's economic empowerment and its role in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was addressed at the United Nation's [2017 High level political forum](#) (HLPF) on Sustainable Development. The following are key statistics, themes, and recommendations that were discussed at the 2017 HLPF:

Women's Role in the Labor Market

Only 50% of working-able women are in workforce, in comparison to the 77% of working-able men that are in the work-force. Moreover, women only make 77 cents for every dollar that a man earns, and they tend to occupy jobs that are vulnerable, less protected, and under-valued. In conjunction with formal work, women perform up to 3 times more unpaid, unofficial, or informal work than men (i.e. housework, cooking, cleaning, collecting water/firewood, fieldwork, taking care of children and the elderly, etc.). Women of color, along with indigenous, refugee, immigrant and migrant women, are amongst the most marginalized women when it comes to participation in/access to informal and formal work.

The Role of Men in the Economic Empowerment of Women and the Interrelatedness of Inequality

Often times, men and boys are persuaded to care about issues that affect women and girls because a woman who is treated unfairly could be their mother, their aunt, their sister, their daughter, etc.; this point is fair to say and somewhat effective in mobilizing men, but it should not be the only reason that men and boys advocate for women and girls, and they certainly should not need to be persuaded to care about issues that affect women and girls. Men and boys should care about issues, such as the economic empowerment of women, because women are people who deserve to have their fundamental human rights expected and respected. Families, communities, and States cannot reach optimal levels of social, economic, and physical well-being when half of the population is excluded or discriminated against. The human rights of women are inextricably tied to all human rights issues and all issues of inequality that hinder sustainable development and ultimately affect everyone.

Recommendations to Economically Empower Women

Not only is the argument for women's economic empowerment morally sound, but it also makes sense from a practical and economical standpoint; specifically, 12 trillion dollars can be added to the GDP by 2025 if gender inequality is eliminated in the labor force. In order to eliminate gender inequalities in the labor force, numerous, systemic, and transformative changes must occur at the local, national, and global level. The following are recommendations that were put forth by panelists at the 2017 HLPF:

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1. Increase access to affordable or universal public services, such as childcare, education, healthcare, and social protection. The lack of accessible, affordable, and equitable public services significantly impedes women's ability to participate in the labor market. This is due to the fact that women perform the majority of informal, unofficial and care work, caring the burden in their families of replacing such needed services with either staying at home or working double or triple shifts.
2. Acknowledge and examine the multiple, complex factors that impact women's ability to access the labor market, such as child marriage, war/conflict, teenage pregnancy, gender-based-violence, and discriminatory laws and policies that exclude and/or hinder women's access to education, political participation, and specific sectors of the labor market.
3. It's time men and the private sector take ownership and accountability for gender-based inequalities. They pay a pivotal role in the fight for gender equality and must be part of the solution.
4. States and regions must commit to prioritizing the empowerment and inclusion of women, recognizing this issue as a pre-condition for sustainable development.
5. Create platforms for women, civil society, and NGOs to communicate, collaborate, and network with relevant stakeholders, as well as members of the private and public sector, bridging the gap between the formal and informal sectors. Multilateral partnerships and alliances are paramount.
6. Increase women's access to credit, banking, and microcredit programs.
7. Enforce minimum wage around the world.
8. Increase access to digital tools and work to end the gender divide in information and communication technologies (ICT). 2.3 billion women do not have access to the internet. ICT harnesses the potential to reach those who are the farthest/hardest to reach and provide them with the tools to initiate and/or exponentially accelerate their access to the labor market.
9. Create laws and comprehensive, holistic policies (at the local, national, and global level) that ensure and enforce gender equality and dismantle the "business as usual" mindset.
10. Encourage women to help other women and create platforms for networking and mentorship. Women should be working with and empowering one another.

Gender equality and sustainable development are codependent entities. Women's economic empowerment has the potential to foster and accelerate substantial gains in human development and in the economy — at both the local and global level.

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Development cannot be transformative or sustainable if half of the population is hindered. Investing in women does and will continue to pay off.