

OVERVIEW AND CALL TO ACTION

Empowering women in the economy and closing gender gaps at work are central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Yet too many gaps persist. How to accelerate progress? Through concrete actions by individuals, businesses, governments, worker and employer organizations, civil society, and multilateral institutions to drive change by addressing systemic constraints.

Expanding women's economic opportunities is central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. More than two decades after the landmark 1995 United Nations (UN) Conference on Women in Beijing and with the unprecedented consensus on the 2030 Agenda, the global commitment to gender equality has never been stronger. For the first time in history, governments have set a concrete deadline for the elimination of gender inequality—the year 2030. And the potential gains for basic human rights, for human development and for economic growth have never been larger.

At the September 2015 UN General Assembly, governments from across the world adopted the 2030 Agenda, with goals to improve lives for all. Applying to all countries and promising sustained, transformative change, the Agenda commits to leave no one behind—not women, not children, not minorities, not migrants, not indigenous people, not people with disabilities. More than that, those who are farthest behind must be moved to the top of the global community's agenda. Today around 1 billion people continue to live in extreme poverty, many of them women and children.

The economic empowerment of women—to succeed and advance economically and to make and act on economic decisions—is a cornerstone of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the past two decades, there has been progress in

closing gender inequalities, especially in education and health. Yet there still is much to do to achieve the full and equal participation of women in society and in the economy.

Today, on the first anniversary of the SDGs, the world is faced with the urgent task of accelerating progress. The UN Secretary-General established the High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment in January 2016 as part of his efforts to ensure that the 2030 Agenda moves from the pages of UN documents into the lives of women—and builds stronger, more inclusive economies. With powerful and influential membership, the Panel seeks to corral energy, commitment and action to accelerate the economic empowerment of women across the world.

After six months of fact finding, sharing best practices and consulting around the world, the Panel presents its findings about proven and promising actions to address gender gaps and accelerate progress. The Panel also presents the new commitments and ongoing activities of its members to break through the constraints facing women in the world of work. And it sets out key principles that guide and inform action. This first report, which outlines the Panel's commitment and thinking during its first six months, will be complemented by a second report that will be informed by further discussions amongst Panel members and by the results from the first year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Women's economic empowerment is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. The case for women's economic empowerment has several interlinked pillars, each integral to progress. First is the universal case for basic human rights. Second is the growth and human development case. And third is the business case. The economic and human development costs of gender gaps are enormous, as are the potential gains from closing them, as

documented in major recent reports that informed the Panel's work. Mounting evidence about the persistence of gaps and the costs of inaction for individuals, communities, businesses and nations underscores the urgency of accelerating progress.

Limited progress, persistent gaps

The pace of improvement in expanding women's economic empowerment and closing gender gaps has been far too slow. And gender inequalities in other critical areas including political representation and protection against violence, are persistent and pervasive. The challenges are interrelated: Constraints on women's economic empowerment are rooted in unaddressed gender inequalities in society.

All too often, discriminatory social norms constrain women's ability to find decent jobs on an equal footing with men. Layers of disadvantage—including those related to poverty, ethnicity, disability, age, geography and migratory status—remain powerful obstacles to equal rights and opportunities for hundreds of millions of women.

This report focuses on women's economic empowerment and their opportunities in the world of work. Women perform the majority of unpaid household and care work. They also work for pay or profit in a raft of ways and contexts—in the formal and informal economy—as waged or salaried workers, employers, own-account workers, and contributing family workers. The gender differences both in unpaid work and in all types of paid work are large and persistent, reflecting constraints on women's economic opportunities and outcomes.

Globally, only one in two women aged 15 and over is in paid employment compared with about three in four men. Indeed, about 700 million fewer women than men of working age are in paid employment in 2016—1.27 billion women against 2 billion men. At the same time, women take on about three times more unpaid work than men.

Even when women are paid, they tend to work in jobs that reflect gender stereotypes and are characterized by relatively low earnings, poor working conditions and limited career-advancement opportunities. In many jobs and sectors, women have restricted scope for collective voice and action. Even when women do the same jobs as men or perform work of equal value, they are paid less on average than men, although the size of the pay gap varies considerably around the world.

Hundreds of millions of women work informally without social and labour protection in law or in practice. In India, for example, some 120 million women (around 95 percent of women in paid work) work informally as do around 12 million women in Mexico (around 60 percent). Expanding opportunities for women in informal work is integral to realizing the SDGs and is a major focus of this report.

Also lagging behind men as entrepreneurs, women are less likely than men to own small or medium-sized enterprises—only 20 percent of firms in the poorest countries have female owners. Women-owned enterprises (WOEs) tend to be smaller, are more likely to be home-based, and are often disadvantaged in their access to credit, resources and assets.

Barriers to gender equality and women's economic empowerment

Why, despite advances in education and rising incomes in much of the world, do these gender gaps in work persist? The evidence points to four overarching systemic constraints to the economic empowerment of women: adverse social norms; discriminatory laws and lack of legal protection; the failure to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid household work and care; and a lack of access to financial, digital and property assets. These constraints undermine women's economic opportunities in all aspects of work (figure 1). To accelerate progress, transformations are needed to break through all of these constraints.

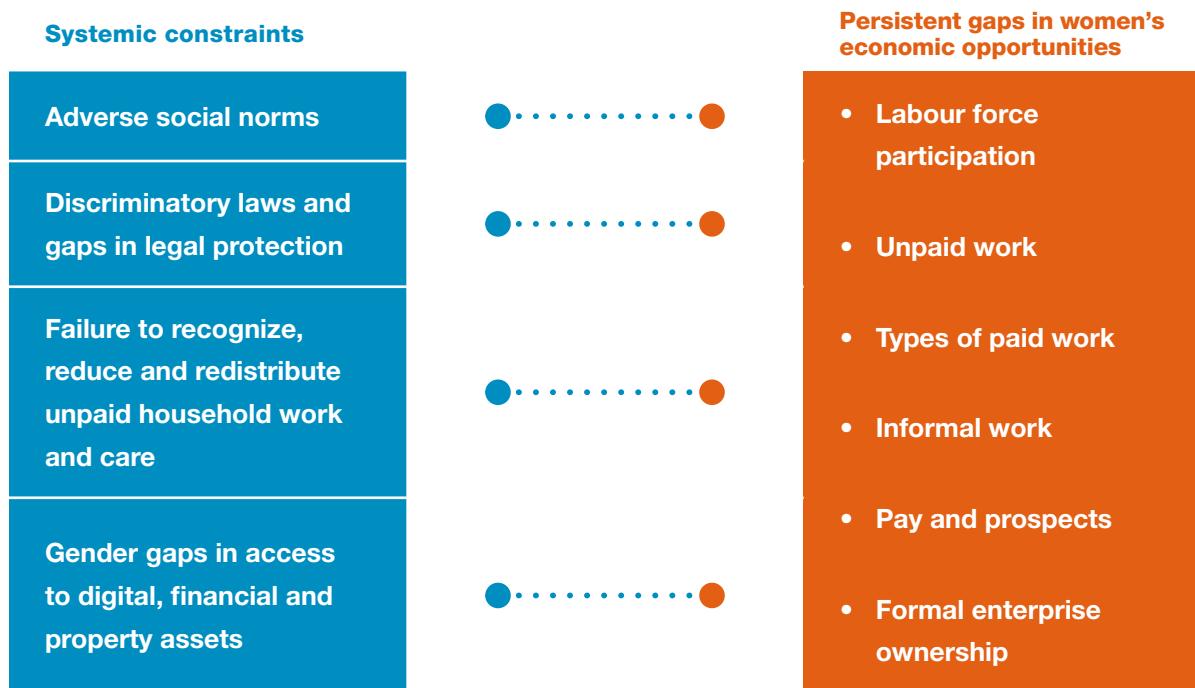
This report highlights four sets of actors to lead and drive change. The public sector can lead by implementing policies to promote inclusive growth and women's economic empowerment, and by improving public sector practices in employment and procurement. The business sector can lead by changing business culture and practices, building on the accumulating experience of companies already promoting gender equality. The United Nations and multilateral organizations can play a critical role in supporting reform and investments. And collective voice is critical—especially women's groups, worker and employer organizations and other civil society organizations—to advocate, represent and hold decisionmakers accountable.

Breaking the constraints on women's economic empowerment—Seven drivers of change

From the wealth and diversity of experience around the world, the Panel identified seven primary drivers of

Figure 1

Major systemic constraints contribute to persistent gaps in women's economic opportunities



transformation (figure 2). For each of these seven drivers of change, the report highlights concrete actions and interventions that are proven, in the sense that they have demonstrated impact in reducing gender gaps—or promising, in the sense that experience and analysis to date suggest valuable potential. To be acknowledged at the outset, however, is that important gaps in data and evidence constrain knowledge and understanding of what works. Addressing these data gaps should be a priority for those committed to driving change and achieving results.

Moreover, not every proven or promising action is appropriate to every situation. Priorities are context-specific, and what is effective differs across countries based on their specific development, institutional and cultural conditions. But large differences in country performance within regions, and at the same development levels, indicate that there is room for significant progress everywhere.

1. Tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models

Challenging and transforming the negative and harmful norms that limit women's access to

work and that often devalue their work are core to achieving women's economic empowerment. Social norms are the rules of behaviour that are considered acceptable in a group or society. There are many norms around the types of work done by women and men; about women's mobility outside the home; about the value of women's work; about the justification for violence against women; and about women and men's rights to expect equal remuneration and respect at work and equal access to property—all of these and other norms shape women's economic empowerment. Decisive actions are needed to break the stereotypes and rules that shape gender divisions of labour.

Changing norms should be at the top of the 2030 Agenda to expand women's economic opportunities. Everyone has a role to play in challenging adverse social and economic norms—girls, women, men and boys within families, communities, businesses, civil society organizations (including women's groups and worker and employer organizations) and government—as part of a comprehensive approach to women's economic empowerment. Starting young is critical, and working at the community level has been shown to bring about

Figure 2

Seven primary drivers of women's economic empowerment



fundamental changes in attitudes and behaviours around gender roles, gender violence and outcomes like girls' educational achievements. Positive role models can accelerate such changes, with examples both from the political sphere (women on village councils) and from the corporate world (Australia's Male Champions of Change). Popular media—television and radio—should challenge rather than reinforce sexist stereotypes about what

is acceptable and typical for women and men, exposing people to different views.

2. Ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations

Laws reflect society's expectations for gender roles. By guaranteeing equal opportunities and protections and by removing legal barriers, governments

signal their commitment to achieve and enforce gender equality. A simple example is changing laws to enable women to open bank accounts in their own names. Laws provide a powerful framework for women to know and assert their rights.

Removing discriminatory laws is essential to accelerating women's economic empowerment. As the World Bank has documented, 90 percent of economies have at least one gender-differentiated law, and 943 gender-differentiated laws have been documented across 170 economies. Legislating specific protection against discrimination is necessary. Governments should respect the basic human rights and protection against discrimination enshrined in international law and in a series of major ILO conventions. These rights include the right to freedom of association.

For informal workers, the legal shift involves moving from stigmatization and criminalization to the assurance of rights and protection. Actions that are being undertaken, often in response to collective action, include legal recognition as workers, regulated access to public space as workplaces, freedom of association and collective bargaining, and access to social protection.

As with informal workers, domestic workers—about one in 25 women in paid employment globally—are without protection. The adoption of the ILO's Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and Domestic Workers Recommendation, 2011 (No. 201) has built momentum for change, and some 70 countries have since advanced decent work for domestic workers, including through ratifications, adopting laws or policy reforms, or working towards this end. Recent progress in extending basic protections to domestic workers is especially evident in Latin America. The Panel calls on all governments to ratify and implement Convention No. 189.

3. Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care

Progress on the agenda to expand women's economic empowerment depends, to a significant extent, on closing the gender gap in unpaid work and investing in quality care services and decent care jobs. Care is provided in homes as well as in institutions; the workers are often informal, lacking legal and social protection.

The reduction and redistribution of care require investments from both the public and private sector.

These investments not only have major benefits for individuals and families but also major benefits for the economy, businesses and society at large, including increasing women's labour force participation in paid work, creating jobs in the care sector and strengthening the education of children, with beneficial effects for the development of their talent and future productivity.

Addressing challenges around care requires recognizing the importance of care and valuing this work. It also requires reducing the time spent on care—by investing in basic infrastructure and in time- and labour-saving technology. And it requires redistributing care—through larger roles for men at home and through public policies such as maternity protection, paid parental leave, publicly supported quality child-care services, early childhood education and other social care services.

Legislative, policy and private actions can do much to close the gender gap in unpaid work and care, though what is appropriate and effective depends on the local context. To reduce the time that women spend on unpaid work and care, public investment in basic infrastructure like water and energy is critical where such services are lacking. Support for quality child, elderly and disability care services as well as decent care jobs should increase.

Working to change norms around the gender division of labour is an urgent task for governments, the private sector and civil society. Interventions to influence norms about the distribution of care responsibilities at home include engaging with men and communities and promoting role models and national awareness efforts using mass and social media. Survey analysis suggests that many men want to be more involved in the lives of their children. Promising initiatives include MenCare, a global fatherhood campaign active across more than 40 countries and dedicated to promoting men's involvement as equitable, nonviolent fathers and caregivers.

Social protection is critical, especially nontransferable maternity and paternity leave benefits and job protection, and so are flexible work arrangements. Fathers' use of parental leave increases when leave is not just paid but well paid—and highest when offered on a "use-it-or-lose-it" basis—and affects norms and behaviours around care at home. Where paid leave is collectively financed, results indicate reduced discrimination against the hiring of workers with potential or actual maternity or family

responsibilities. Practices such as the recognition of companies implementing good business practices for gender equality and flexible work arrangements through a seal or certificate can help to promote social co-responsibility of care.

Caring for the elderly also tends to reduce female labour force participation and hours worked. This will become a larger challenge as societies age, most markedly in Asia and Europe. Many countries are exploring ways to support more equitable sharing of responsibility for care of the elderly, ill and disabled.

4. Building assets—Digital, financial and property

Eliminating gender disparities in work and in society depends on eliminating gender disparities in access to key assets. Accumulating experience shows how public policy, private firms and civil society can increase digital inclusion and reduce the digital gender gap, especially in lagging regions and countries.

Laws, policies and regulations can support digital inclusion while addressing security and privacy concerns. Broadband plans should address barriers to access, affordability and adoption, with adequate funds for implementation. Public–private partnerships can create innovative solutions and improve access, even in rural and remote areas. Affordability needs to be addressed for low-income customers, through public subsidies, reduced pricing or free access. As an example, the National Telecommunications Fund in Costa Rica connects communities through schools and community centres. It also establishes local networks and connects public sector organizations. Corporations can also expand access by offering “entry-level” broadband Internet at an affordable price.

Both governments and the private sector can facilitate women’s access to financial services. Where discrimination exists in law, governments need to reform the relevant laws. The major push on the global agenda to facilitate access to identification documents is important here. Know-your-customer requirements to open basic bank accounts can be reduced by linking such requirements to the likely risks posed by customers. Reducing the costs of opening and maintaining a savings account can increase access, as can financial products tailored to the different needs of women.

Digital financial solutions have enormous promise. By 2013, 219 mobile money services were offered

in 84 countries. Research on Kenya’s M-PESA shows the potentially dramatic impacts of digital financial services on women’s economic and social well-being. Countries should ensure that digital financial services are associated with greater access and use among women as well as men. A practical way to accelerate financial inclusion is to move cash payments of social benefits and wages into bank accounts. About 80 million unbanked women around the world receive government transfers and wage payments in cash. Making these payments digitally would expand their financial inclusion.

There are major grounds for optimism based on the trends and innovations in digital technology and finance and on the increasing pace of reform to land and property law. But the poorest must not be left behind by the new technologies and their needs must be addressed by legal reforms.

5. Changing business culture and practice

Business culture, practice and policies are major drivers of women’s economic opportunities. At a minimum, companies should comply with national laws and follow ILO conventions on gender equality to eradicate discriminatory practices, eliminate gender gaps in legal and social protection and enable the equal participation of men and women in trade unions, employer and business membership organizations and other worker organizations.

Beyond basic protections and standards that are the “right thing to do,” companies are realizing the business value of women’s economic empowerment —supporting and enabling women to reach their full potential at all levels of the value chain—as leaders, employees, suppliers, distributors, customers and community members.

The agenda begins in-house—addressing explicit and implicit bias in recruitment and promotions; ensuring robust, formal pay equity processes with avenues for recourse; and offering training and mentoring for women to develop their skills. Companies should offer family-friendly policies to all employees, including maternity and paternity leave, flexible work options and support for childcare and elderly care. IKEA Group, a Co-Chair of the Panel, is addressing all of these issues. IKEA AG, the company subsidiary in Switzerland, has already achieved the highest level of EDGE certification, a measure of a company’s commitment to gender equality.

More and more companies are adopting targets to increase the share of trade and procurement with WOEs and female cooperatives, and undertaking outreach and providing training to support such efforts. WEConnect International, a Panel member, and others are working to expand women's economic opportunities on this front.

Companies need to combat the risk of exploitation of workers in their supply chain, including the lower tiers where women are overrepresented. Actions on that front include recognizing and respecting freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; ensuring safe and healthy working conditions and hours; and paying living wages. The Better Work programme—supported by the IFC and ILO—and Oxfam's Behind the Brand illustrate approaches to improve outcomes for women working in global supply chains. There are many potential bottom line gains from improving conditions for workers in supply chains, including increased consumer and investor support, stronger worker engagement, reduced turnover, greater productivity and less risk.

A key factor in changing business culture and practice is business leadership at the highest level, with determined follow-through to measure and monitor results and hold management accountable. Male leaders can be effective champions of gender diversity and inclusion agendas.

Companies can signal their commitment to gender equality and women's economic empowerment by signing and implementing the Women's Empowerment Principles, a joint initiative of the UN Global Compact and UN Women.

6. Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement

Beyond their key roles in determining the legal, institutional and policy environments that affect women's economic opportunities, governments are major employers and procurers of goods and services. The power of governments in setting high standards for and exemplifying gender equality at work cannot be underestimated.

About 16 percent of women who work are in the public sector, ranging from almost half in Norway, down to 2 percent in Uganda. Like private companies, governments should review and modify their recruitment, training, promotion and pay practices to eliminate implicit biases and

stereotypes that disadvantage women and to ensure gender equity.

Public procurement accounts for 10–15 percent of GDP in developed countries and averages more than 30 percent in developing countries—with trillions of dollars of goods and services procured from the private sector every year. Yet globally, only an estimated 1 percent of public procurement contracts go to WOEs.

Governments need to review the rules and practices that have largely excluded WOEs. Procurement targets to boost women's shares have been adopted by several governments—including Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and the United States. Another promising innovation is a government requirement that firms bidding for procurement contracts disclose information about their gender pay equity—as in Switzerland and in the Albuquerque city government.

7. Strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation

Women's collective and representative organizations, especially those representing women at the base of the pyramid, play a critical role in driving women's economic opportunities.

The rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining are fundamental labour and human rights, enshrined in ILO conventions going back to the 1940s. These rights apply to all workers, including workers in the informal economy. Exercising these rights requires enabling legislative and policy frameworks, as well as funding and support. Women's knowledge must be at the heart of policymaking and programming to be responsive to women's needs as women and as workers.

Restrictions and challenges need to be addressed, particularly for women and minority groups organizing in contexts where they have few rights. In addition, worker, employer and business membership organizations should allow working women to voice their needs and demands, enhance their bargaining power, advocate for legal and policy reforms, and increase access to markets on fair and efficient terms.

Women's organizations and collective enterprises can benefit from access to finance, business and leadership skills, and technical advice and assistance, such as how to link to markets and supply chains.

A call to action—Join us

This report is a call to action. To realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is a pressing need to step up actions to close gender gaps and ensure the full economic empowerment of women by 2030. To guide and inform action, the Panel has set out seven key principles (box 1).

Actions to address the challenges confronting women at the base of the pyramid are particularly important to honour the 2030 Agenda commitment to leave no one behind.

Investments are needed that will not only have major benefits for individuals and families but also bring major gains for the economy, businesses and society at large.

To move this agenda forward, new partnerships—among governments, multilaterals, business, civil society and thought leaders—are essential. Within these partnerships, each type of actor can take

concrete steps to accelerate progress. These steps should be set against concrete timelines and permeated with a sense of urgency. In order to achieve gender equality and the full economic empowerment of women by 2030, significant progress will be needed by 2020 already and a conscious and special effort is required to accelerate the slow pace of change.

Governments

- ✓ Remove discriminatory legislation and provide a positive policy and legal environment that supports women's economic empowerment, including:
 - Establishing nondiscrimination, adequate minimum wages, equal pay for work of equal value, maternity protection and paid parental leave.
 - Setting and enforcing effective laws to protect women from violence and exploitation at work.

Box 1

Seven principles for a transformative agenda for women's economic empowerment

No woman left behind. The focus must be on women at the base of the economic pyramid, regardless of their characteristics or circumstances. Leaving no one behind—including the 1 billion people still living in extreme poverty—is a key principle of the 2030 Agenda.

Nothing done for women without women. Women's voice and participation must be central to all actions.

Equal focus on rights and gains. Enabling women's economic empowerment is not only the “right” thing to do to honour the states' commitment to international human rights. It is also the “smart” thing to do for human development, inclusive growth and business.

Tackle root causes. Addressing adverse social norms and all forms of discrimination is critical. Gender inequality in the economy is rooted in and reinforces gender inequality in society.

State parties must respect international human rights and labour standards. Actions by states must be consistent with agreed upon international standards—as laid out in the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and in ILO conventions and recommendations.

Partnerships are critical. Progress requires action from the local to the global level and by all parts of society—individuals, businesses, governments, employer and worker organizations and civil society—often working in partnerships to achieve scalable and sustainable impact.

Deliver globally. This is a global agenda. While the challenges and solutions vary, action is needed in every country.

- Creating an enabling environment for decent work for all.
- ✓ Adopt macroeconomic policies to boost short-term and long-term inclusive economic growth.
- ✓ Deliver gender-smart employment and procurement practices.
- ✓ Recognize women workers' organizations and create structures where they can be represented.
- ✓ Ratify ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) setting labour standards for domestic workers.
- ✓ Provide adequate support to enable women to work productively, including by investing in quality public care services and decent care jobs, social protection for all, and infrastructure that supports women's safe access to economic opportunities.
- ✓ Invest in norm change campaigns and support community-level norm change programmes, including through education.
- ✓ Spearhead national processes for data collection and identification of national and local priorities.

Businesses

- ✓ Urgently address discrimination, implicit bias, abuse and health and safety issues in their workforce and ensure that suppliers do the same.
- ✓ Create enabling environments for female employees to succeed in businesses through flexible work options, family-friendly policies, equal pay for work of equal value, as well as training, mentoring and sponsorship.
- ✓ Invest in initiatives to reduce and redistribute unpaid care and work.
- ✓ Promote positive role-modeling of economically empowered women and leaders.
- ✓ Integrate and support women, women-owned enterprises and women's collective enterprises in supply chains.
- ✓ Create products and services to meet the needs of women, particularly underserved groups.

- ✓ Work in partnerships with governments and civil society to achieve financial and digital inclusion for women.
- ✓ Challenge stereotypes through advertising and media communications.
- ✓ Map and monitor performance on gender equality in business operations, including throughout supply chains, and share success stories to inspire others in a race to the top.
- ✓ Adopt the Women's Empowerment Principles.

Civil society: Women and their organizations

- ✓ Work with women, particularly the most marginalized, to amplify their voices and support representative organizations to negotiate with local and national government and other bodies.
- ✓ Encourage women's participation and leadership in trades unions, organizations of informal workers, and employers' and business membership organizations.
- ✓ Bring together women for networking and mentoring.
- ✓ Take forward advocacy and strategic litigation to protect the rights of informal, or otherwise vulnerable, workers.

International development institutions

- ✓ Establish and implement gender strategies, under the SDG framework, to ensure that:
 - Work on economic issues reflects the need for increased women's economic empowerment.
 - Technical support and resources are allocated for implementation of institutional strategies for women's economic empowerment.
- ✓ Provide technical and financial support to women entrepreneurs.
- ✓ Work together with governments to support women's rights organizations by ensuring women's right to organize and their representation in key policymaking spaces and providing support that is available and accessible to these groups.

Box 2

The need for investments in data and analysis

The data revolution called for in the 2030 Agenda must have women and girls at its heart. Effective decisionmaking relies on high-quality and timely data. Key economic data must be disaggregated by sex (and by other relevant characteristics). There is also a need for improved data and analysis on issues of particular importance to women's economic empowerment, such as unpaid care work, informal work, part-time work and domestic work. Digital technologies, which are changing data collection and analysis capabilities faster than expected, can be—and already are being—leveraged.

Better sex-disaggregated data are critical to the better understanding of the causes of gender gaps and to the better design and evaluation of actions to address them. More and better data presented in user-friendly formats will help policymakers, advocates and researchers.

- ✓ Work together with governments to develop standards for, gather, use and disseminate national data on women's economic empowerment.

Thought leaders and academics

- ✓ Expand and disseminate the evidence base on what works for women's economic empowerment.
- ✓ Scan and identify risks and opportunities for women's economic empowerment in emerging trends, including global instability, climate change, demographic change and technological advances.
- ✓ Develop programmes and initiatives to support women and girls in the fields of science, mathematics, engineering and new technologies.

In their organizations and working with their constituencies, Panel members are already leading a range of activities to reduce gender gaps and empower women. The Panel's actions are guided by the seven agreed principles and focus on the seven primary drivers of women's economic empowerment. Many of the activities of Panel members are described in

the report and in an online Action Agenda (www.WomensEconomicEmpowerment.org).

Alongside their actions, all Panel members, recognizing their distinct institutional mandates, commit to influence their networks, to make new connections and to facilitate partnerships among public entities, the private sector, employer and worker organizations, civil society and individuals. On its website and in continuing consultations around the world, the Panel will share evidence and good practices through action-oriented research, policy briefs, and menus of actions. Indeed, this report is not the end of the Panel's work—it is the start of a process to embark on new actions and establish new partnerships across global stakeholders.

The Panel calls on you to join in taking action to accelerate women's economic empowerment and to create the global movement that is needed to change the lives of women across the world by 2030.

The Panel members note that those who represent international organizations have expressed commitments to take action against constraints facing women within the scope of, and consistent with, their respective institutions' mandate.