

JANUARY 2016

BUSINESS  
LEADERSHIP FOR  
AN INCLUSIVE  
ECONOMY

# Building Effective Women's Economic Empowerment Strategies

## Sector-Specific Opportunities and the Case for Collaboration



## About This Working Paper

The business community's motivation and ambition to advance women's economic empowerment is greater than ever. More than 1,000 business leaders have signed the Women's Empowerment Principles, committing to empower women in the workplace, marketplace, and community. Despite this, progress has been too slow at a time when the importance of women to business and the risks of limiting their participation in the economy are growing at a rapid pace.

This working paper aims to help companies build effective strategies for women's economic empowerment by applying a holistic and integrated approach: "Holistic" in considering the broader conditions necessary for women's advancement and "integrated" in leveraging the full set of business assets a company can deploy. This approach builds on a growing body of evidence demonstrating the importance of addressing systemic and structural barriers to gender equality for women to achieve their full economic potential.

This report draws on insights gathered from interviews with 10 multinational companies actively engaged in advancing women's economic empowerment as well as a comprehensive review of the latest literature and leading company practices and programs. While it focuses on opportunities for multinational companies in four industry sectors, many of the lessons are relevant across a range of industries and companies. This report brings together the collective knowledge and expertise of BSR, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), and the Oak Foundation and our combined decades of experience implementing and assessing women's empowerment programs in partnership with companies. It also expands upon and deepens analysis previously conducted by Dalberg Global Development Advisors and ICRW, which was also sponsored by the Oak Foundation.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Foreword

It has been 20 years since world leaders gathered in Beijing and agreed on what many argue is the most progressive blueprint for advancing women's rights. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action envisioned gender equality in all dimensions of life and provided inspiration and guidance to political leaders around the world. At that time, women were a rarity on business leadership teams, in corporate boardrooms, and as owners of businesses.

There is no question the world has made progress in advancing the rights of and opportunities for women over the last 20 years and that the private sector has been critical to this progress. The number of women in the labor force, starting businesses, and leading major organizations around the world is a testament to the business sector's investments in women's empowerment programs and systemic efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. However, as the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reaffirmed, there is still much to be done to ensure that women can achieve their full potential, without which the world will struggle to achieve any of the SDGs. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon argued in September 2015, "[w]e cannot achieve our 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development without full and equal rights for half of the world's population, in law and in practice."

BSR and ICRW have been committed to advancing the rights of women and gender equality for more than two decades. At BSR, women's empowerment is a centerpiece of our work with our more than 250 corporate members and other partners and is critical to our *Business Leadership for an Inclusive Economy* and *Business in a Climate-Constrained World* initiatives. We have seen HERproject, our workplace-based women's empowerment initiative, grow from several pilot studies to become the largest public-private collaboration on women, impacting 350,000 women with the aim to reach 5 million women by 2020.

ICRW is a leading voice and resource on measurable evidence-based solutions to empower women, fight poverty, and advance gender equality. Its research, capacity-building, and advocacy have helped corporations, governments, and civil-society organizations design and implement effective approaches to women's empowerment and improve the lives of millions of women.

This report marks an important milestone for both organizations' work to advance women's empowerment as well as in our collaboration across sectors. With the Oak Foundation, we will be launching the Investing in Women Collaborative Initiative to strengthen the quality and quantity of investments by business in women's empowerment and ensure greater benefits for women and business. We know that the scale of the challenges requires collaborative solutions that draw on the expertise, resources, and networks of multiple partners; it is in this spirit that we invite you to read this report and join us in realizing the vision set out 20 years ago in the Beijing Declaration.



**Aron Cramer**  
President and CEO  
BSR



**Sarah Degnan Kambou**  
President  
International Center for Research on Women



## Executive Summary

Economically empowering women is key to reducing poverty, growing economies, and building healthy and safe communities. This was reaffirmed in September 2015 when world leaders adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and committed to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

A growing number of leading companies agree: Women not only have the right to achieve their full economic potential, ensuring they do so is essential to business innovation, productivity, risk management, and market growth. More than 1,000 business leaders have signed the Women's Empowerment Principles to promote gender equality, and companies have invested more than US\$300 million in women's economic empowerment programs to date. These efforts, among others, have helped women participate more fully in the economy than at any other time in history.

Yet much progress remains to be made. Women and men are far from equal in most societies. Women remain a rarity in leadership roles and gender pay gaps persist across levels in many industries. Women continue to face legal and cultural barriers to owning land, opening a bank account, and accessing products and services that could improve their health and well-being and that of their families.

### A Holistic and Integrated Approach

While many companies actively promote women's economic empowerment, the majority are still trying to figure out the most effective approach to do so. To date, most companies have been approaching women's economic empowerment through isolated programs and investments. These have led to some incremental improvements for women—as well as benefits to business—but the private sector has much more to offer and to gain for advancing opportunities for women. A growing wealth of evidence demonstrates that gender equality in business cannot be achieved without advancing gender equality in society. In turn, when the private sector champions gender equality, it can be among the most powerful drivers of societal change. In both cases, real transformation for women will happen when companies tackle the structural and systemic barriers standing in the way of women's economic advancement. As this report recommends, companies can achieve greater impact and create more business value by employing a holistic and integrated approach, one that addresses underlying systemic barriers to women's economic empowerment and includes gender considerations across the entire company.

This report builds on research previously conducted by the International Center for Research on Women and Dalberg Global Development Advisors, which described eight building blocks and six business assets that are essential to designing and implementing successful women's empowerment initiatives in the private sector. In this new report, we more fully describe these and provide examples of how they can be applied in four industry sectors. Each industry, by nature of its activities and geographic reach, has a unique ability to contribute to women's empowerment.

### 8 Building Blocks to a Holistic Approach to Women's Economic Empowerment

1. Access to safe and equitable employment opportunities
2. Access to and control over economic resources and opportunities
3. Education and training
4. Social protection and childcare
5. Access to and control over reproductive health and family formation
6. Freedom from the risk of violence
7. Voice in society and policy influence
8. Freedom of movement

We provide illustrative examples for the following industries:

- » The **Information and Communications Technology (ICT)** industry is helping improve the lives of millions of women through better access to markets, knowledge, and networks. Yet the gender digital divide persists in many countries, undermining the industry's ability to equalize women's and men's opportunities. Moreover, when women do access the internet, they face troubling rates of online harassment. As the industry grows, it also faces challenges in attracting and retaining female employees at all job levels. There are signs of change, however, thanks to some pioneering companies that are exploring better parental leave policies, investing in science and technology education for girls, and engaging in debate with governments and peers about how to unlock more opportunities for women as employees and users of technology.
- » The **Healthcare** industry has a unique role to play in helping improve the lives of women through access to medicines and care. While some leading companies have been working to expand this access, much more is needed to address the affordability and availability of medical care for women. Women's perspectives and needs also must be considered more fully during the early stages of R&D for new medicines and medical technology. Challenges to women's advancement as employees and frontline healthcare workers also remain. Strengthening the skills, knowledge, and access to equipment for frontline health workers is a critical opportunity for the industry to address talent shortages in healthcare delivery as well as strengthen opportunities for women.
- » The **Financial Services** industry has been steadily expanding efforts to improve women's financial literacy, provide more savings and credit options, and offer training and mentoring for women business owners. However, in much of the world, legal and socio-cultural barriers continue to limit women's access to and use of financial products and services. As women become an increasingly important investor and client demographic, more banks and insurance companies are seeing the need to attract and retain women at all levels of the industry to reflect their changing client base and capture a growing market.
- » The **Consumer Products** industry has played a critical role in unlocking economic opportunities for women in manufacturing, retail, and agriculture. Yet women tend to hold some of the lowest-paying jobs in the industry and face unique challenges to their health, safety, and well-being. The industry reaches billions of consumers every day, providing it incredible opportunities to shape and influence the mindsets and behaviors of both men and women through its marketing, products, and retail services.

## Tackling Common Barriers to Progress

Finally, this report provides emerging lessons and advice for how companies can overcome a range of common barriers to improving the impact of their women's economic empowerment investments. For a holistic and integrated approach to be successful it must be accompanied by supportive corporate structures and culture, robust measurement systems, and effective partnerships.

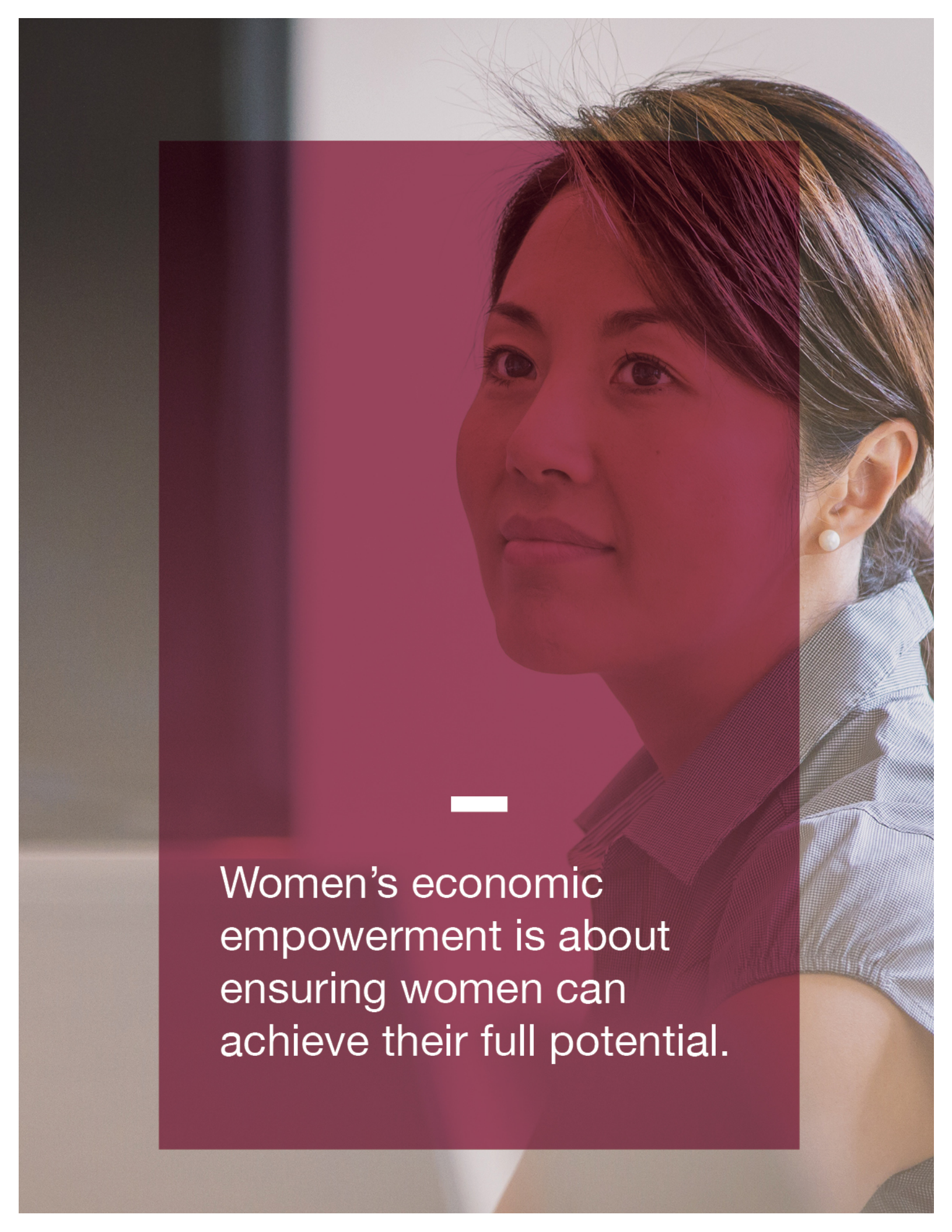
Most investments in women's economic empowerment have developed organically and from the grassroots level in companies. This organic growth means that women's empowerment often is housed in a variety of departments with few mechanisms for communicating progress, addressing common barriers, and leveraging each other's resources and achievements. To address this, a growing number of companies are creating cross-functional teams, a unified vision, and a set of common goals around women's economic empowerment.

In order to determine what's working, fix what's not, and engage in constant quality improvement, companies must invest in monitoring and evaluating their women's empowerment initiatives. The majority of companies collect data on the number of women hired or reached by a particular program, but it is rare to find them collecting more meaningful data on how, if at all, women and business are benefitting from these efforts. In addition to program measurement, companies also face challenges in measuring and reporting ongoing progress in advancing women's empowerment. Developing disaggregated sets of data can help evaluate gender imbalances across a range of corporate indicators.

Finally, partnerships are a fundamental requirement to making progress, but building them can be challenging. As companies begin to employ more holistic approaches, it is important to leverage the networks, resources, and expertise of a range of actors, particularly women's organizations that work locally in some of the hardest-to-reach places and on some of the most complex issues. Finding the right intermediary to connect with strategic local partners to facilitate designing and implementing programs in local contexts is important to effective partnerships. Successful partnerships leverage much more than cash from companies, making use of their expertise, employee talent, geographic reach, and influence with key stakeholders including government and consumers.

With the adoption of the SDGs, global leaders, including business leaders, laid the groundwork for a multi-sectoral effort to build an inclusive economy. There is abundant optimism for how the private sector can help ensure that all people equally benefit from and contribute to global and local economies. Now is the time for action. Doing so will require a new level of ambition, new ways of working, new forms of collaboration, and constant learning. BSR, ICRW, and the Oak Foundation along with many other peers and partners, such as the Win-Win Coalition, will be providing support to companies and businesses along the way toward a shared goal: a gender-equitable world, where both women and men can achieve their full potential.





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Women's economic empowerment is about ensuring women can achieve their full potential.



# Introduction

Women's economic empowerment is now widely recognized by governments and businesses around the world as important in its own right, as well as essential for human progress and business success. It has been hailed as a critical driver of economic growth, a pre-condition for alleviating poverty, and the foundation for ensuring every child has a sustainable future.<sup>1</sup>

World leaders who gathered at the United Nations in September 2015 reaffirmed this when they adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a universal and ambitious set of 17 goals that made gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a priority of international and national development agendas.<sup>2</sup> It is also why more than 1,000 business leaders representing some of the largest companies from around the world have committed to the Women's Empowerment Principles.<sup>3</sup>

This momentum has encouraged many leaders, including PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi, to argue that we are now living in the “decades of women.”<sup>4</sup> Despite this recognition, companies are struggling to build effective approaches to empowering women. Many companies across sectors are pursuing an array of women's empowerment programs, including investments to strengthen access to finance for female entrepreneurs, enhance skills of low-income working women, increase gender diversity in boardrooms, and improve girls' education. Many of these programs have achieved notable results, improving the lives of women and delivering positive business outcomes. Yet these efforts only scratch the surface. Gender impacts every aspect of business, but it is still treated as a niche issue in most companies. This leads not only to missed opportunities for business but also to a failure to address some of the underlying issues preventing more progress on women's economic empowerment, with implications for poverty alleviation, economic growth, and sustainable development.

This working paper aims to help companies build effective women's economic empowerment strategies through a holistic and integrated approach. The first two sections clarify what women's economic empowerment means, why it is important for business, and outlines the key building blocks of a holistic and integrated approach. The third chapter highlights challenges and opportunities for four industry sectors: information and communications technology (ICT), healthcare, financial services, and consumer products. It uses the key building blocks as a framework to assess key challenges facing women in each industry and opportunities for companies to use a broad suite of assets to drive change. The last two sections unpack common barriers to progress and invite companies to support greater collaboration.

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<sup>1</sup> Clark, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The Global Goals for Sustainable Development, [www.globalgoals.org/](http://www.globalgoals.org/).

<sup>3</sup> Women's Empowerment Principles, <http://weprinciples.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> Nooyi, 2015.

## Understanding Women's Economic Empowerment

When newly elected Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau responded to reporters who asked why women would represent 50 percent of his Cabinet he said, "Because it's 2015."<sup>5</sup> Women are participating more fully in the formal economy than at any other time in human history. Women now account for more than 40 percent of the global labor force and are at the helm of major organizations and companies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Motors, and IBM.<sup>6,7</sup> Female entrepreneurs are growing in number and growing their businesses: Eight to 10 million small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in emerging markets have full or partial female ownership, representing more than 30 percent of registered SMEs.<sup>8</sup>

Despite these achievements, women remain far from equal in many countries and in many aspects of life. Only half of all women are in the labor force, compared to more than three-quarters of all men.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, women earn approximately 77 percent of what men earn. At the current rate of change, pay equity between women and men will not be achieved before 2086.<sup>10</sup> While women comprise more than 40 percent of the agricultural labor force, they represent only 20 percent of landowners.<sup>11</sup> Women now hold 21 CEO positions at S&P 500 companies—but this is almost 50 years after Katharine Graham became the first female CEO of a major company, and still represents a dismal 4.2 percent of S&P 500 companies.<sup>12</sup>

**Women's economic empowerment** is about ensuring women can achieve their full potential. This is not possible if women and girls do not have access to high-quality education and healthcare. This is not possible if women's work is consistently devalued by employers and if women do not have the power to make and act on economic decisions. And this is not possible if girls and women do not feel safe and free from harassment and violence. This does not mean that all women will pursue the same path to economic empowerment—some will do so through entrepreneurship, others will climb the corporate ladder, and some will excel on the factory floor. But for all women, becoming empowered means having the knowledge, tools, and power to make decisions for themselves.

### DEFINITION

#### Women's Economic Empowerment

In this paper, we use the definition of women's economic empowerment developed by the International Center for Research on Women: "A woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Harris, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Elborgh-Woytek, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> The World Bank, "World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development," 2011.

<sup>8</sup> IFC and Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, "Strengthening Access to Finance for Women-Owned SMEs in Developing Countries," 2011.

<sup>9</sup> UN Women, "Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights," 2015.

<sup>10</sup> ILO, "Women and the Future of Work: Beijing +20 and Beyond," 2015.

<sup>11</sup> FAO, "The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: Women and Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development," 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Catalyst, "Women CEOs of the S&P 500," [www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500](http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500). Accessed January 21, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Marie Golla et al., 2011.

# We've made progress...but gaps remain.

## EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK



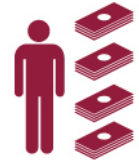
**PROGRESS:** Gender pay gaps narrowed in 45 out of 50 countries with available data between 2000 and 2010.

Source: UN Women

77%



100%



**GAP:** Globally, women earn approximately 77 percent of what men earn. At this rate, pay equity between women and men will not be achieved before 2086.

Source: ILO

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP



**PROGRESS:** Today, women hold 21 CEO positions at the world's largest companies, up from zero in 1995.

Source: Catalyst



**GAP:** Women still represent less than 5 percent of CEOs at S&P 500 companies.

Source: Catalyst

## DISCRIMINATION



**PROGRESS:** 128 economies have laws that guarantee married women's equality when it comes to property, and 112 economies give equal inheritance rights to daughters and sons.

Source: World Bank



**GAP:** Women face job restrictions in 100 economies. They are barred from working in certain factory jobs in 41 economies and in 18 economies they cannot get a job without permission from their husbands.

Source: World Bank

There is a need for an explicit focus on women's economic empowerment for three primary reasons.

Firstly, **women's contributions and needs are often overlooked.** Women's health, particularly reproductive health, and the important role that women play in childrearing have profound effects on women's ability to participate fully in the economy. Seventy-five percent of the world's total unpaid care is undertaken by women, including child care, caring for the elderly, cooking, and cleaning.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, seven in 10 children living with single mothers are poor.<sup>15</sup> Approximately 830 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth every day.<sup>16</sup> Women are also uniquely vulnerable to threats to their safety and security as well as external shocks such as natural disasters.<sup>17</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one in three women worldwide experiences gender-based violence in her life and women and girls also make up the majority of people affected by forced labor and human trafficking.<sup>18, 19, 20</sup> Unfortunately, women's contributions and needs are often overlooked by governments and employers.

Secondly, **women face unique barriers.** In most countries, women are treated differently under the law and/or in practice.<sup>21</sup> For example, many countries have laws limiting female property ownership and workforce participation. A World Bank report that looked at 173 national economies found that women face job restrictions in 100 economies; women are not allowed to work in certain factory jobs in 41 economies; and in 18 economies, they cannot get a job without their husbands' permission.<sup>22</sup> Beyond laws, inadequate enforcement and cultural norms also impact women's mobility, access to education and healthcare, and control over income, all of which impact women's economic advancement. Despite major advances in closing the gender gap in educational attainment in many countries, women's labor-force participation and pay still lag behind men on average.<sup>23</sup> In Japan, for example, the gap in educational attainment has been closing at impressive rates, although women's labor-force participation rate is only 63 percent, compared to 85 percent for men, and Japan's salary gap in earned income is the 79<sup>th</sup> largest in the world.<sup>24</sup> Laws, as well as deeply engrained stereotypes and discrimination, all play a role in limiting opportunities for women.

Thirdly, **women continue to lag across major development indicators.** Almost two-thirds of the world's 757 million illiterate adults are women.<sup>25</sup> The gender gap in education and health is particularly stark for lower-income women or women who are ethnic minorities.<sup>26</sup> For women aged 15-44, HIV/AIDS is the

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<sup>14</sup> Woetzel et al., 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Mather, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> WHO, "Fact Sheet N° 348 on Maternal Mortality," [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs348/en/). Accessed January 21, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> UN Women Watch, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> WHO, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> ILO, "ILO Global Estimate of Forced Labour: Results and Methodology," 2012.

<sup>20</sup> UNODC, "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons," 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> The World Bank. "Women, Business and the Law 2016: Getting to Equal," 2015. <http://wbl.worldbank.org/~media/WBG/WBL/Documents/Reports/2016/Women-Business-and-the-Law-2016.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> World Economic Forum and McKinsey & Company, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, UIS Fact Sheet: Adult and Youth Literacy, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



leading cause of death worldwide, with unsafe sex being the main risk factor in developing countries.<sup>27</sup> In almost all countries, women are more likely than men to engage in low-productivity activities and unpaid family employment or work in the informal wage sector.<sup>28</sup> Despite modest improvements, women are underrepresented at every level of today's corporations, especially in senior positions.<sup>29</sup> Although women have made impressive gains in the last couple of decades, there are concerns that rapidly changing demographics, growing income inequality, climate change, and other major trends could cause women to fall farther behind.

## A Holistic and Integrated Approach for Business

An ICRW/Dalberg report entitled "The Business Case for Women's Economic Empowerment," commissioned by the Oak Foundation, found that companies have collectively invested more than US\$300 million in women's economic empowerment over the past decade.<sup>30</sup> Many of these corporate-funded programs focus on direct investments to enhance women's skills, knowledge, and access to goods and services. Some companies have also adjusted corporate policies or strategies to expand opportunities for women. This includes commitments to gender diversity in upper management or on corporate boards, as well as the intentional integration of women-owned business into value chains. Many of these initiatives have improved the lives of thousands of women and provided tangible benefits to business. The report also outlines some of the motivations for these initiatives, including reputational benefits, employee recruitment and retention, and supply chain stability.

Yet existing corporate-led programs also have limitations. As the authors of the World Bank's "Gender at Work" report noted, "Overcoming gender inequality will not result from specific isolated programs, but from a comprehensive approach that involves multiple sectors and stakeholders."<sup>31</sup> There is growing evidence and consensus among experts that real progress will come when companies go beyond opportunistic and siloed initiatives to adopt a **holistic** and **integrated** approach to women's economic empowerment. This approach addresses underlying systemic barriers to women's economic empowerment and includes gender considerations across the entire company.

**Holistic** refers to a focus on the broader systemic and structural factors that hinder women's progress. This approach seeks to deliver the broader conditions necessary for women to thrive and succeed alongside other investments in training, employment, and financial support. It is grounded in respect for human rights and the need to redress discriminatory practices that impede progress.<sup>32</sup> This approach is supported by a recent McKinsey study that links gender equality in society with gender equality in work, finding that the latter is not possible without the former.<sup>33</sup> Research conducted by ICRW and Dalberg highlights eight essential building blocks to women's economic empowerment.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> WHO, "Women and Health: Today's Evidence Tomorrow's Agenda," 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Barton, Devillard, and Hazlewood, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> This is based on an analysis of 31 corporate-funded programs to strengthen women's economic empowerment performed by Dalberg and ICRW. For more information, see [www.icrw.org/publications/business-case-womens-economic-empowerment-integrated-approach](http://www.icrw.org/publications/business-case-womens-economic-empowerment-integrated-approach).

<sup>31</sup> Morton et al., 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> ICRW, "The Business Case for Women's Economic Empowerment: An Integrated Approach," 2014.

**Integrated** refers to mainstreaming or embedding gender throughout companies and leveraging the full set of business assets at their disposal. It means going beyond diversity commitments and philanthropic programs to build women's economic empowerment into corporate strategy and to transform corporate mindsets, policies, and practices in favor of gender equality across the corporation from boardroom to factory floor. This paper builds on the ICRW/Dalberg study, which highlighted 5 key assets that companies can deploy. This report has added advocacy to that list, in recognition of the powerful influence companies can have in raising awareness on key issues and championing legislation that enables women's economic empowerment. (More explanation of these assets can be found in the appendix.)

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# Holistic and Integrated Approach to Women's Economic Empowerment

**ASSETS:** Companies can develop an integrated approach by leveraging the full set of business assets at their disposal.



People



Investment



Purchasing Power



Brands and Products



Advocacy



Partnerships



**BUILDING BLOCKS:** Companies develop a holistic approach to women's empowerment by focusing on the full range of systemic and structural factors that hinder women's progress.

1

Access to safe and equitable employment opportunities

2

Access to and control over economic resources and opportunities

3

Education and training

4

Social protection and childcare

5

Access to and control over reproductive health and family formation

6

Freedom from the risk of violence

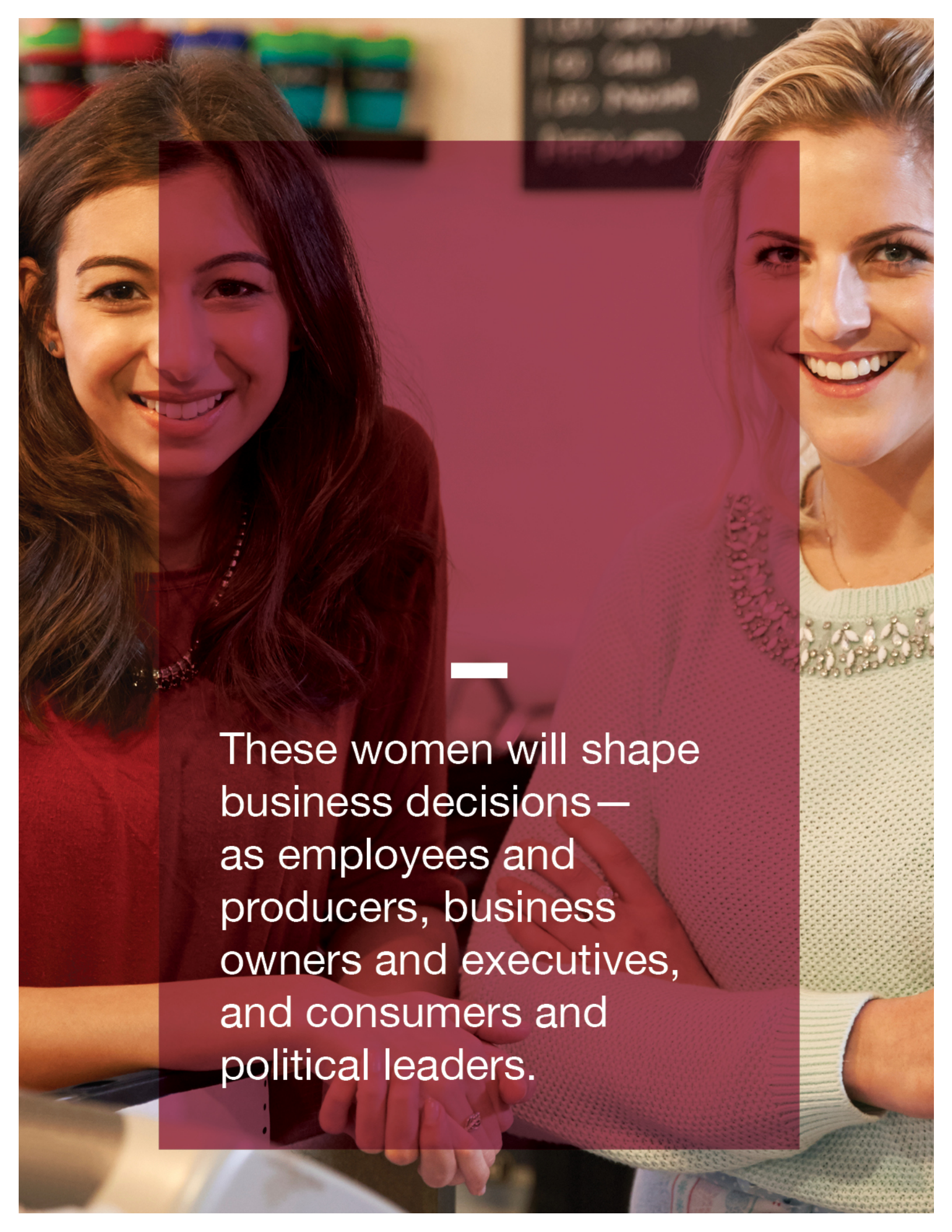
7

Voice in society and policy influence

8

Freedom of movement





—

These women will shape  
business decisions —  
as employees and  
producers, business  
owners and executives,  
and consumers and  
political leaders.



## Capturing Opportunities for Women and Better Business

“Women’s empowerment is not just a fundamentally moral cause, it is also an absolute economic no-brainer,” said Christine Lagarde, the head of the IMF, at the W20 Conference in Ankara, Turkey in September 2015.<sup>35</sup> She told representatives of the 20 largest economies that gender equality has the potential to boost growth, raise overall per capita income, tackle poverty, and reduce income inequality for people all over the world.

For business, the case is equally clear. Nearly 1 billion women are poised to enter the global economy over the next decade.<sup>36</sup> These women will shape business decisions—as employees and producers, business owners and executives, and consumers and political leaders. Empowering women to reach their full potential is not only important for creating attractive, enabling environments for business, but also has proven essential to innovation, productivity, and market growth.

Much has been written about the business case for women’s economic empowerment. In the visual that follows, we highlight five key reasons why women’s economic empowerment is good for business. Companies that prioritize gender equality have been shown to be good long-term investments. According to one of the leading gender-lens investing firms, these companies take advantage of a larger talent pool, engage in better decision making, and have workforces that are more reflective of and responsive to their customer base.<sup>37</sup> While studies show that companies with greater gender equality have higher returns on equity and better stock performance, an even more compelling case exists around the opportunities that investing in women presents for future market growth, especially as women’s incomes grow around the world.

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“Women account for most of our growth, over 70 percent of the decision makers buying our products, 40 percent of our management, and up to 30 percent of our smallholders in the supply chain.” – Senior manager, Unilever

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<sup>35</sup> Christine Lagarde, "Delivering on the Promise of 2025: Keynote Address by Christine Lagarde" (paper presented at the W-20 Summit, Ankara, Turkey, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Aguirr, et al., 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Pax World Investments. "Pax World Women's Initiatives," 2009. [www.genderprinciples.org/resource\\_files/PaxWorld\\_Womens\\_Initiatives\\_1\\_15\\_10-1.pdf](http://www.genderprinciples.org/resource_files/PaxWorld_Womens_Initiatives_1_15_10-1.pdf). Accessed January 21, 2016.

# Women's Economic Empowerment = Better Business



## ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE

It builds healthy economies and drives greater investment in communities.

**\$28**  
TRILLION

If women participated in the economy **equally** to men, it would add up to **US\$28 trillion**, or 26 percent, to **annual global GDP** in 2025 compared with a business-as-usual scenario.

Source: McKinsey Global Institute.

**90%**

Women **reinvest** upwards of **90 percent** of their income into the health, nutrition, and education of their families—triple the value of men's investments.

Source: United Nations



## GROWTH IMPERATIVE

It unlocks new market opportunities and strengthens customer loyalty.

**\$20**  
TRILLION

Women represent 85 percent of all consumer purchases and women control **US\$20 trillion in global spending**.

Source: Boston Consulting Group

**90%**

Women make more than **90 percent of purchasing decisions** for home furnishings, vacations, and homes, and more than 50 percent of purchasing decisions for automobiles and consumer electronics. Source: Boston Consulting Group



## FINANCIAL IMPERATIVE

It delivers better returns on equity and higher stock performance.

**26%**

Companies with the most women board directors outperformed those with the least in return on sales by 16 percent and return on invested capital by **26 percent**.

Source: Catalyst

**70%**

Publicly traded companies with high levels of diversity are **70 percent** more likely to **capture a new market**. Source: Center for Talent and Innovation



## OPERATIONAL IMPERATIVE

It improves operational effectiveness, productivity, and employee engagement.

**30%**

If female farmers in developing countries had the same access to productive resources as men, they could **increase yields** on their farms by **20 to 30 percent**, thereby raising agricultural output and reducing the number of hungry people by 12 to 17 percent.

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization

**4:1**

Investing in the health of low-income women in the supply chain can deliver **4:1 return** on investment **due to cost savings** from reduced absenteeism and staff turnover.

Source: BSR HERproject



## TALENT IMPERATIVE

It drives innovation and ensures a strong and capable talent pipeline.

**50%**

More than half a billion women have joined the world's labor force over the past 30 years and women represent **more than 50 percent** of the world's university students today.

Source: World Bank

**70%**

More than **70 percent** of millennials expect their employers to focus on societal or mission-driven problems.

Source: Deloitte

## OPPORTUNITIES BY INDUSTRY SECTOR

While every industry has a role to play in advancing women's economic empowerment, each faces a unique set of challenges and opportunities. As actors in local and global economies, companies can spur progress through their own policies, practices, and products that directly impact women; they also indirectly impact women by enabling and influencing other industries and actors to take action.<sup>38</sup>

This report features four industry sectors: ICT, healthcare, financial services, and consumer products.<sup>39</sup> It is intended to provide a more nuanced view of how different industries can create change and initiate discussions about where greater collaboration is needed. These sections are not intended to be a prescriptive list of recommendations, but rather to serve as inspiration for companies to consider how they can broaden their range of approaches to accelerate progress.

A detailed discussion of each industry can be found in the appendix, including:

- » A brief overview of the primary ways the industry interacts with women as employees, in the supply and distribution channels, and as consumers, as well as strategic reasons for the industry to invest in women.
- » Perspectives on the industry's progress and challenges in achieving a holistic approach to women's economic empowerment using the eight building blocks.<sup>40</sup>
- » Opportunities and some real-world examples of how companies in the industry are currently leveraging different business assets to advance women's economic status. We categorize these activities by individual assets, yet in many cases companies are employing multiple assets simultaneously.

The table below highlights key findings from the industry research. Our research revealed that some building blocks already have the attention of and considerable support from specific industries, but in the table below we highlight three urgent building blocks that we believe represent a significant opportunity for both women's advancement and business benefit.

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<sup>38</sup> Nelson et al., 2015.

<sup>39</sup> These industries were selected based on a range of criteria, including the significant level of engagement by the industry in women's economic empowerment and BSR and ICRW's own knowledge and networks.

<sup>40</sup> Due to the limited scope of this research, the perspectives provided in the building blocks should not be viewed as a comprehensive assessment of the status of the building blocks for each industry.

**Table 1. Industry Opportunities for Action**

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY	HEALTHCARE	FINANCIAL SERVICES	CONSUMER PRODUCTS
<p>The internet and mobile communications have helped improve the lives of millions of women through better access to markets, knowledge, and networks. As the industry grows, it faces an expanding set of challenges, including talent shortages, a high attrition rate of female employees, and troubling rates of online harassment. Through its products and services, the industry could play a more significant role in amplifying women's voices and engaging in debate on issues that matter to women.</p>	<p>Women are critical players in the healthcare industry. Yet women face challenges to advancement, as employees and also as frontline healthcare workers. Daunting talent shortages are placing an even higher priority on investing in strengthening the skills, knowledge, and access to equipment for frontline health workers. The industry has taken great strides to improve access to care and medicines over the last decade. Despite this, more is needed to address affordability and availability of medicines as well as ensuring that women's perspectives and needs are considered during research and development.</p>	<p>In much of the world, legal, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers severely limit women's access to and use of financial products and services. The industry has been steadily expanding efforts to improve women's financial literacy, provide more savings and credit options, and offer training and mentoring for women business owners. As women become an increasingly important investor and client demographic, more companies are seeing the need to attract and retain women at all levels of the industry to reflect their changing client base and capture a growing market.</p>	<p>The consumer products industry has played a critical role in unlocking economic opportunities for women in manufacturing, retail, and agriculture. Yet women tend to hold some of the lowest-paying jobs in the industry and face unique challenges to their health, safety, and well-being. The industry reaches billions of consumers every day, providing it incredible opportunities to shape and influence the mindsets and behaviors of both men and women through its marketing, products, and retail services.</p>
<p><b>Opportunities for Action</b> Education and training</p> <p>Freedom from the risk of violence</p> <p>Voice in society and policy influence</p>	<p><b>Opportunities for Action</b> Education and training</p> <p>Access to and control over reproductive health and family formation</p> <p>Voice in society and policy influence</p>	<p><b>Opportunities for Action</b> Access to safe and equitable employment opportunities</p> <p>Access to and control over economic resources and opportunities</p> <p>Social protection and childcare</p>	<p><b>Opportunities for Action</b> Access to safe and equitable employment opportunities</p> <p>Access to and control over reproductive health and family formation</p> <p>Freedom from the risk of violence</p>





A holistic and integrated approach to women's economic empowerment requires greater awareness of gender norms and women's needs across every function in companies.



## Common Barriers to Progress

“The business case is clear, so why aren't we seeing more progress?” One of our interviewees raised this question and it is a common refrain among a range of stakeholders. There is a sense that the business case or rationale for investing in women's economic empowerment is widely recognized, but translating this into practice is much more difficult. Our research confirmed that existing governance structures, measurement systems, and corporate culture stand in the way of more progress.

A holistic and integrated approach to women's economic empowerment requires greater awareness of gender norms and systemic challenges facing women across every function in companies. This requires looking at company key performance indicators, employee engagement, and incentive structures through a new lens to determine whether they make it easier or harder to promote gender equality and diversity. It requires looking not only at what a woman does at work but also what factors outside work affect her ability to work productively and reach her full economic potential. Applying this new approach effectively demands adjustments to existing corporate structures and systems. This section highlights three common challenges companies face in designing and implementing effective women's economic empowerment strategies. We also highlight some emerging examples and lessons on how companies are beginning to address these barriers.

## How Do We Build a Supportive Corporate Culture and Organizational Structure?

Making women's economic empowerment a strategic priority is an essential foundation for progress. However, McKinsey has reported that gender equality was a top-10 strategic priority for only 28 percent of companies it surveyed in 2010, and a third did not have it on the strategic agenda at all. The situation improved somewhat by 2015, but there is still a long way to go.<sup>41</sup> Most investments in women's economic empowerment have developed organically and from the grassroots level in companies. But, with the help of global leadership initiatives such as the Women's Empowerment Principles, many more CEOs and corporate boards have started to take seriously women's economic empowerment as a driver of business value.

This organic growth also means that women's economic empowerment efforts tend to be housed in a range of divisions, departments, and functions inside companies. Often employees in these different functions have few mechanisms for communicating progress, addressing common barriers, and leveraging resources. For example, most companies have identified gender diversity as a priority for human resources departments, but rarely do these individuals engage with other parts of the company on areas of potential cooperation. These silos can lead to inefficiencies and missed opportunities.

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<sup>41</sup> McKinsey & Company, “A CEO's Guide to Gender Equality,” 2015.

Some companies are exploring different governance structures that can support women's economic empowerment as a strategic priority. For example, some are bringing people together in cross-functional teams to explore synergies and build a corporate-wide vision and common set of goals to unite different departments. Unilever has identified women's empowerment as part of its Sustainable Living Plan, its blueprint for business growth while reducing its environmental footprint and increasing its positive social impact.<sup>42</sup> The company has developed a 360-degree approach to incorporate women's empowerment across all of its company functions and departments. The internal strategy is primarily driven by human resources, but the external engagement is led largely by the sustainable development team. Individual brands within Unilever also take ownership of women's empowerment based on the needs and issues relevant to their respective value chains and consumer segments.<sup>43</sup>

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**“Initially [women’s empowerment] was at a grassroots level with champions at each level and within each department, but our CEO endorsement of the Women’s Empowerment Principles provided a catalyst for integration.”**

– Georgie Passalaris, Global Sustainable Development Team, Diageo

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Alongside changes to governance structures and the creation of corporate-wide commitment is a need to instill diversity and a culture of inclusion inside companies. That can mean changing long-held beliefs and deeply ingrained behaviors, a process that takes time and can be difficult and unsettling for many individuals and teams. Andres Tapia, a leading voice on new approaches to diversity and inclusion, has argued that without focusing on building a supportive culture, companies will end up with diversity *without* inclusion.<sup>44</sup> This may lead to more women coming in the door and some superficial gains and short-term business wins, but will not lead to sustainable change. Even good policies fail if there is a widespread impression that supervisors and senior leadership have not embraced them.

Encouraging senior leadership as a champion and vocal advocate is important for setting the tone and fostering inclusion inside companies. While women leaders, in many cases, may be natural messengers and role models for women's economic empowerment, male voices and actions can be equally (if not more) powerful influencers. The HeForShe campaign, which engages male decision makers across sectors as impact champions, has helped create solidarity and institutionalized gender equality. This list includes Vittorio Colao, CEO of Vodafone; Adam Bain, COO of Twitter; and Jes Staley, CEO of Barclays, among many others.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Unilever, Sustainable Living, [www.unilever.com/sustainable-living](http://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living). Accessed January 21, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> BSR interview with senior manager at Unilever.

<sup>44</sup> Tapia, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> HeForShe, [www.heforshe.org/](http://www.heforshe.org/).

In addition to CEO engagement, companies can use data-driven insights to understand differences in attitudes and beliefs of women and men toward each other and their work environment. Following a major effort to increase the number and proportion of senior leadership roles held by women at eBay Inc., the company conducted a global gender diversity survey on the attitudes and experiences of its top 1,700 leaders. As the company reported in a 2014 article in McKinsey Quarterly, the results revealed that the majority of women felt that their male colleagues did not understand them very well, though a majority of men felt well-understood by the women. Women were significantly less likely than men to believe that their opinions were listened to and more likely to doubt that the most-deserving people received promotions. Although eBay had increased the proportion of women in leadership roles by 30 percent in two years, the survey showed that women's experience at work had not changed significantly. The company identified a mix of unconscious mindsets, behavior, and blind spots that colored employees' gender perceptions.<sup>46</sup>

To address this, the company made a few important changes that sought to educate and equip everyone to embrace individual differences as a path to success. This included making the CEO accountable for progress on women's empowerment. In addition, eBay introduced new metrics on increasing women in leadership roles as well as reducing their attrition rate and improving women's satisfaction with their jobs. The CEO also committed to mentor five women leaders.<sup>47</sup>

Sodexo has also focused on creating a systemic culture change for the company and its employees, clients, and customers. The company's diversity plan not only focuses on employees, but also on how they can support diversity and inclusion in the marketplace. All senior executives are required to participate in its mentoring program, and more than 60 percent of the pairings are cross-cultural. A one-day Spirit of Inclusion session is mandatory for all managers and focuses on building awareness and skills around diversity and inclusion. In addition, the company offers more than 25 learning labs on a variety of dimensions of diversity that help employees continually focus on and strengthen their knowledge, enhance awareness, and develop their skills to foster a more inclusive environment.<sup>48</sup>

#### **Early lessons on building a supportive culture and structure:**

- » Embed principles/goals for gender diversity and women's empowerment in every agenda within the company and identify concrete ways to leverage assets across the company.
- » Create cross-functional teams with overlapping responsibilities for women's economic empowerment to communicate progress and identify synergies.
- » Develop a common vision, goals, and messages about women's economic empowerment to unite the different activities across the organization and foster a culture of inclusion.
- » Activate female and male leaders as champions and advocates for gender equality.

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<sup>46</sup> Angier and Axelrod, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Sodexo, Diversity and Inclusion, [http://sodexousa.com/us/en/corporate\\_responsibility/responsible\\_employer/diversity\\_inclusion/diversity\\_inclusion.aspx](http://sodexousa.com/us/en/corporate_responsibility/responsible_employer/diversity_inclusion/diversity_inclusion.aspx). Accessed January 21, 2016.



- » Create appropriate incentives and accountability mechanisms that promote inclusion and dialogue within companies.

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**“Embedding women’s economic empowerment is core to our business strategy and culture at Unilever. Sustainable Development Goal 5 recognizes the importance of women’s empowerment and sets a vision of a gender-equal world.”** – Senior manager, Unilever

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## **How Do We Measure and Assess Progress?**

In order to determine what’s working, fix what’s not, and engage in constant quality improvement, companies must invest in monitoring and evaluating their women’s empowerment initiatives. Yet very few companies invest adequate resources in this area. The majority of companies collect data on the number of women hired or reached by a particular program. But more meaningful data on how, if at all, women and business are benefiting from these efforts is rare. Having this information would greatly improve companies’ ability to calculate a return on investment and better articulate the connections between women’s empowerment and business growth and sustainability.

Many standardized measures exist for assessing varied domains of women’s empowerment, and they are constantly improving. The UN Foundation and ExxonMobil Foundation have convened development economists and experts to develop recommended measures to assess intermediate, direct, and final outcomes of women’s economic empowerment programs. The final report, published in June 2015, offers insights on what measures to use as well as how to measure.<sup>49</sup>

There are inherent complexities to measurement. Some interventions take time to show effects and it can be difficult to develop a credible counterfactual to determine whether and how outcomes changed as a result of programs. Moreover, the links between social and economic factors that influence women’s economic empowerment make it difficult to isolate cause and effect. In some cases, there may be trade-offs, with advances in some areas and a worsening in other areas. Data collection is also fraught with challenges, especially in resource-constrained environments.

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<sup>49</sup> UN Foundation and ExxonMobil Foundation, 2015.

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**“We need to gather real quantitative data to capture the impact of our work over time.”** – Wilma Wallace, VP Global Sustainability, Gap Inc.

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A few companies are adopting a more rigorous approach to evaluating the impact of their women's empowerment work. Gap Inc., Nike, and Goldman Sachs have all commissioned independent impact evaluations of programs. Unilever has published a series of economic impact studies and convened leading businesses and development organizations to identify some of the common measurement challenges.<sup>50</sup>

Sodexo also conducted a study of the impact of gender-balanced teams on performance. In this internal study of 50,000 managers in 80 countries, Sodexo found that gender-balanced teams (male to female ratio of 40-60 percent) outperformed non-gender-balanced teams on a host of internal performance indicators including employee engagement, gross profit, brand image, and organic growth. This study sheds light on the strategic importance of gender diversity for Sodexo with relevant lessons for other companies.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to program measurement, companies also face challenges in measuring and reporting on ongoing progress in advancing women's empowerment. The Global Reporting Initiative and the IFC have been working to strengthen the inclusion of gender into corporate reporting.<sup>52</sup> Yet very few companies have developed disaggregated data to help evaluate gender imbalances across a range of corporate indicators. Some companies are experimenting with new metrics, combining quantitative and qualitative metrics to provide a more complete picture of progress and gaps. This means looking beyond the number of female employees in specific roles to look at retention, promotion, and job satisfaction.

**Early lessons on measuring and assessing progress:**

- » Link the company's gender equality and women's empowerment strategy to a measurement framework that includes both qualitative and quantitative indicators.
- » Create goals and targets that go beyond program reach to examine empowerment outcomes and impacts for women.
- » Consult with experts in measuring women's empowerment who can recommend appropriate data-collection strategies and indicators and assist with analysis.

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<sup>50</sup> Unilever, Opportunities for Women Strategy. [www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/the-sustainable-living-plan/enhancing-livelihoods/opportunities-for-women/](http://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/the-sustainable-living-plan/enhancing-livelihoods/opportunities-for-women/). Accessed January 21, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Sodexo, “Sodexo analyzes the Impact of Gender Balance Performance,” Sodexo Gender Balance Business News, 2015. [www.sodexo.com/en/Images/SODEXO\\_GBBN2015\\_GB\\_WEB342-849016.pdf](http://www.sodexo.com/en/Images/SODEXO_GBBN2015_GB_WEB342-849016.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Miles and Niethammer, 2009.

- » Share monitoring and evaluation methods and results with other companies. Seek to learn about what other companies are doing, what they are measuring, and how you can work together to advance understanding and catalyze progress.

## How Can We Partner Effectively Across and Within Sectors?

Partnerships are fundamentally important to making progress, but building them can be challenging. As companies begin to employ more holistic approaches to women's empowerment, it will be very important to leverage the networks, resources, and expertise of a range of actors, particularly women's organizations that work locally with women in some of the hardest-to-reach places and on some of the most complex issues.<sup>53</sup> Research conducted by The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) found that of the US\$14.6 billion that has been pledged to 170 initiatives involving women and girls between 2005 and 2020, only 27 percent engage women's organizations as partners, and only 9 percent directly fund grassroots women's organizations.<sup>54</sup> These organizations have unparalleled trust and access in communities but, as smaller organizations, they are likely to require companies to approach partnership differently.<sup>55</sup> As companies pursue more holistic and integrated approaches to women's economic empowerment, there is incredible potential for greater reach and impact through these partnerships.

Some companies are working through women's funds, such as the Global Fund for Women, the African Women's Development Fund and Fundo ELAS, a Brazilian women's fund. These funds provide financial support for local women's organizations on which they have done due diligence, and with whom they have also often worked as partners on a variety of issues. As a result, women's funds are able not only to help locate strong local women's organizations around the world, but also can assess their capacity to work with a corporate partner and, if necessary, help further build that capacity.

Johnson & Johnson, for example, has enhanced its work on maternal and newborn health issues by partnering with the Global Fund for Women over a number of years. Among other things, the Global Fund helped J&J identify local organizations in countries with high maternal mortality that are training traditional birth attendants. In the past four years alone, J&J supported 12 local women's organizations identified by the Global Fund to train nearly 4,000 traditional birth attendants in eight countries with high maternal mortality rates—from Bangladesh to Ghana to Mexico. The company's senior manager for Worldwide Contributions, Chunmei Li, explained in an article by Marissa Wesely of the Win-Win Coalition, which promotes cross-sector collaboration to advance gender equality, and Dina Dublon, former CFO of JPMorgan Chase, that they chose to work with "Global Fund for Women because of its ability to connect to hard-to-reach women through their networks of [grassroots women's organizations] and community-based programs. Global Fund for Women has an excellent record of helping grassroots women's organizations develop the capacity to grow and be sustainable."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Many of these organizations operate in a single country or in a single region of a country, and their work typically involves one or more of the following activities: education about legal rights and political participation; skills training for economic empowerment; education about, and access to, reproductive and maternal healthcare; access to collective savings and credit programs; and advocacy with regard to issues such as sexual violence and property rights. See more at: Marissa Wesely and Dina Dublon, "Empowering Women at the Grassroots," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Doherty, Singh, and Arutyunova, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

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**“It’s not all about grants. We need to move towards a more sustainable model, using our products, network, and infrastructure to help a program continue.”** – Payal Dalal, Community Investment, Standard Chartered

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The Win-Win Coalition, the International Network of Women's Funds, and other organizations have been documenting some of the lessons and best practices of effective cross-sector partnerships and collaborations.<sup>57</sup> Finding the right intermediary to connect with strategic local partners to facilitate design and implementation in local contexts is the starting point.<sup>58</sup> Some of the other lessons include the importance of building trust and identifying common goals and metrics early in a partnership. Daniel Lee, Executive Director of the Levi Strauss Foundation, argues that trust is the connective tissue of relationships, and when coming from distinct sectors, trust is best built by personal contact.<sup>59</sup>

It is also important to take co-designing seriously to allow each party to maximize its unique skills and expertise. Through its Improving Worker Well-Being Initiative, Levi Strauss is partnering with key suppliers, local nonprofits, and other companies to scale worker-empowerment initiatives in the apparel industry.<sup>60</sup> The company has engaged all of these partners, including workers themselves, in co-designing the initiative. Intensive listening, ceding control, and bringing together unlikely bedfellows has allowed each partner to put its unique capabilities and expertise to work.<sup>61</sup> This collaboration has also demonstrated the importance of considering a broader range of opportunities for collaboration—viewing partnership as more than providing cash and goods but also about leveraging employee talent, corporate influence, consumer engagement, and communications muscle.

**Early lessons on partnering effectively across and within sectors:**

- » Focus on building trust with likely and unlikely partners through meaningful relationship-building.
- » Identify common goals and metrics early on that are meaningful for all parties involved.
- » Recognize the range of opportunities and assets that can be leveraged for collaboration.
- » Take co-designing seriously by listening and recognizing when to compromise.

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<sup>57</sup> "Win-Win Coalition," [www.winwincoalition.org/home](http://www.winwincoalition.org/home).

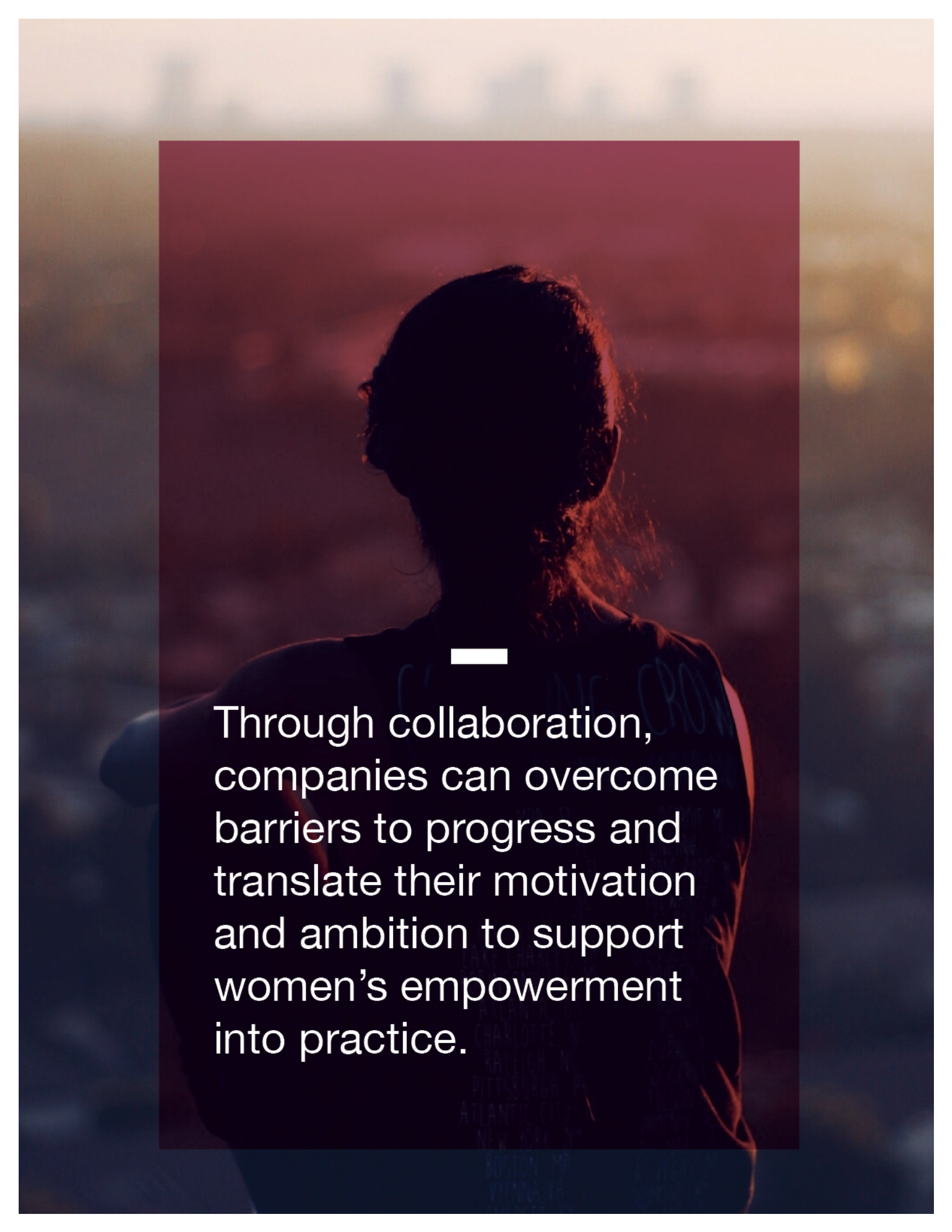
<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Lee, 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Levi Strauss & Co, 2014.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, 2015.



A silhouette of a woman with her hair tied back, looking out over a body of water at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, red, and purple, with the sun low on the horizon. The water is dark and reflects the light from the sky. The woman's silhouette is dark against the lighter background.

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Through collaboration,  
companies can overcome  
barriers to progress and  
translate their motivation  
and ambition to support  
women's empowerment  
into practice.

## Way Forward

Our ability to lead prosperous and dignified lives within the boundaries of the Earth's natural resources is dependent on the empowerment and advancement of women, who represent half the world's population. Companies, governments, and civil society actors must enter the post-2015 world with a renewed sense of urgency and a commitment to doing their individual and collective parts to achieve gender equality.

At no other time in human history has the ambition of the public, private, and the nonprofit sectors to achieve women's economic empowerment been so great. The momentum has been building, and business and society cannot afford to ignore the potential this presents for greater action and collaboration across and within sectors. Collaboration is not only needed to bring together different ideas for how to overcome common barriers, but also to identify new and innovative solutions and amplify voices that call for better policy environments. For example, the Win-Win Coalition is working to strengthen corporate partnerships with women's funds and grassroots women's organizations. It grew out of a need to create new spaces for knowledge production, relationship development, and mobilizing resources across sectors.<sup>62</sup> Other local and global collaborations exist to help companies scale investments, implement targeted programs, and make best use of the expertise and networks of different sectors and organizations.

For our part, in 2016, BSR and ICRW, with the support of the Oak Foundation, will launch the "Investing in Women" Collaborative Initiative to help companies integrate gender considerations and approaches to women's empowerment across their operations and investments. The Initiative will be comprised of cross-sectoral companies interested in identifying opportunities, partnerships, and measurement approaches to effectively advance women's empowerment throughout their operations. More specifically it seeks to:

- » Assist companies to improve how they design and implement effective, integrated women's empowerment strategies.
- » Build a community of shared learning across various sectors and geographies.
- » Identify partnerships to improve program design for successful local implementation.
- » Evaluate the progress and results of women's programs more rigorously.
- » Identify opportunities for collective action on women's empowerment issues.

A world where women succeed is good for business. Now, let's make it happen.

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<sup>62</sup> Win-Win Coalition, [www.winwincoalition.org/home](http://www.winwincoalition.org/home).

# Appendix

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BSR wishes to thank all of the stakeholders who participated in the research, including BSR industry experts Dorje Mundle (Healthcare) and Elisa Niemtow (Consumer Products) as well as representatives from all of the companies below.

BNY Mellon

C&A Foundation

Diageo

Gap Inc.

Intel

Merck & Co, Inc.

Nestlé

Standard Chartered

Unilever

Vodafone

## DESCRIPTION OF BUSINESS ASSETS

The descriptions below build on an overview of the assets in the ICRW/Dalberg report entitled “The Business Case for Women’s Economic Empowerment.” Some modifications were made to the original list of assets and the descriptions.

- » **People:** How companies promote diversity, equality, and inclusion at all levels in the company. It includes the policies, practices, systems, norms, and attitudes that influence the perception and opportunities for women. This can also include how companies leverage their internal human resources and employees to advance women’s economic empowerment internally and externally.
- » **Investments:** How companies use their philanthropic investments and grant-making to support the advancement of women. In many cases, investments are coupled with other assets such as partnerships and advocacy to maximize reach and impact.
- » **Partnerships:** How companies draw on relationships with local, regional, and global NGOs, governments, peer companies, and others to address barriers to progress and advance women’s economic empowerment. This includes how the company pools resources, expertise, and networks of partners together to drive change.
- » **Purchasing Power:** How companies leverage their purchases of products and services along the value chain to advance women’s empowerment with suppliers, contractors, and other distributors. This includes companies’ procurement and sourcing policies and practices, codes of conducts, enforcement mechanisms, as well as direct investments in workforces.
- » **Brands and Products:** How companies use their brands and products to contribute to and enable advances in women’s economic empowerment. This includes how the company considers factors that affect access to the product, including price, convenience, and education, among other factors. It also includes how companies’ marketing and advertising activities influence norms and perceptions and impact women’s empowerment.
- » **Advocacy:** How companies use their communications tools, dialogue with policymakers, and research to advocate for changes to enabling environments at a local, national, and global level to advance women’s economic empowerment.



## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The ICT industry sector consists of companies engaged in manufacturing semiconductors, communications equipment, computer hardware, and technology-related office equipment, as well as providers of consulting, communication, and IT services.

Women as Employees. Women are an important part of the ICT workforce, driving innovation and strengthening organizational performance. With the talent pipeline shortages in the tech industry expected to reach an estimated 1 million by 2020, women are essential to ensuring the industry continues to grow and meet rising demands for its services.<sup>63</sup>

Women as producers, suppliers, and distributors: Women are also a powerful force in the supply chain. They represent a significant portion of the workforce in light manufacturing globally, including consumer electronics and electronic components. This makes women's empowerment essential to operational efficiency, product quality, and timely delivery.

Women as Consumers and Users. Women also use their estimated US\$20 trillion in purchasing power to acquire half of all computers and more than 80 percent of all consumer goods around the world.<sup>64</sup> Yet access to these products remains unequal, representing an unfulfilled market opportunity for business.<sup>65</sup> It is estimated that reducing the gender digital divide could unlock a market opportunity of US\$50-70 billion in new sales of platforms and data plans as well as contribute an estimated US\$13-18 billion annually to developing countries' GDPs.<sup>66</sup> Other research shows that countries benefit from 1.2 percent more GDP for every 10 percent increase in mobile penetration.<sup>67</sup>

The ICT industry has incredible potential to advance gender quality and inclusive economic growth. The internet has been called the great "equalizer" by providing people—regardless of race, gender, and in many cases income level—access to the same information, tools, networks, and markets. Not only does the industry touch billions of women directly as employees and users, it also offers products and services that enable other industries to advance women's empowerment.

The industry has made incredible strides in expanding access to technology among women, particularly in developing countries, and in turn enabling them to participate more fully in markets and gain critical knowledge and skills to improve their incomes and well-being. Yet, as the industry grows it faces a growing set of challenges to gender equality and human rights that threaten its role as an important contributor to and enabler of women's economic empowerment.

## ACCESS TO EQUITABLE AND SAFE EMPLOYMENT

Women face significant challenges in accessing equitable employment opportunities in the ICT industry. While women make up half of the United States workforce, they represent 27 percent of all computer science professionals, down from 30 percent a decade ago.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, women appear to be leaving the

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<sup>63</sup> Anita Borg Institute, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Vodafone Group. 2016. Women - Our Approach. [www.vodafone.com/content/sustainabilityreport/2014/index/transformationalsolutions/women.html](http://www.vodafone.com/content/sustainabilityreport/2014/index/transformationalsolutions/women.html). Accessed January 21, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Intel Corporation, Dalberg Global Development Advisors, and World Pulse, 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Vodafone Group, "Connected Women: How Mobile Can Support Women's Economic and Social Empowerment," 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Beede et al., 2011.

technology industry at twice the rate of men.<sup>69</sup> Studies show that women who work in science and tech are 45 percent more likely to leave the industry than their male peers.<sup>70</sup> One study of more than 5,000 female engineering graduates in the United States found that one of the most frequently cited reasons for not pursuing a career in engineering was the perception of engineering as being inflexible or the workplace culture as being non-supportive of women.<sup>71</sup>

Although the gender pay gap in ICT appears to be less than in some other industries (around 90 percent), women make up just over 10 percent of executives within the Silicon Valley 150, the Bay Area's top tech companies.<sup>72</sup> That's compared to 16 percent in the S&P 100.<sup>73</sup> Women are also noticeably absent as founders/owners of tech start-ups. In the United States, some research estimates that only 7 percent of venture-backed startups are founded by women, despite the fact that they have 35 percent higher ROI and deliver 12 percent higher revenue.<sup>74</sup> While awareness of the gender gaps in employment, entrepreneurship, and promotion are growing, experts argue that a non-inclusive culture and implicit bias in favor of men is not only contributing to discrimination but also causing women to self-select out of the industry.

Women are also some of the lowest-paid workers in the supply chain and often work in difficult conditions including long hours, potential exposure to health hazards, and limited professional development opportunities. In some electronics manufacturing centers, explicit gender preferences in recruitment materials are not uncommon.<sup>75</sup> Women are also particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses including forced labor, a growing concern for the electronics industry in large manufacturing hubs like Malaysia.<sup>76</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**People.** Strengthening transparency on diversity metrics is an important step toward improving access to equitable employment opportunities. Intel has publicly disclosed diversity numbers for more than a decade and Google, Microsoft, Apple, and several others have recently followed suit.<sup>77</sup> This disclosure is helping companies like Symantec set goals to expand diversity in company leadership and in key roles.<sup>78</sup> Salesforce has also conducted a review of the salaries of its 17,000 employees and is now pursuing a commitment to pay equality.<sup>79</sup>

**Brands and Products.** The ICT industry is uniquely positioned to use its products and services to create greater economic opportunities for women. Not only can the data gathered through various web platforms provide critical insight into gender gaps, but products can also facilitate hiring practices more tailored to the needs of women. LinkedIn is drawing on user data to provide insight into gender equality across every

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Green, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Fouad, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Goldin, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Bell and White, 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Klein, 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Kuhn and Shen, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Connell, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Kessler, 2015.

<sup>78</sup> Symantec. Our People - Diversity and Inclusion: Symantec's Diversity Vision & Goal. [www.symantec.com/corporate\\_responsibility/topic.jsp?id=diversity\\_inclusion](http://www.symantec.com/corporate_responsibility/topic.jsp?id=diversity_inclusion). Accessed January 21, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Robbins, 2015.

industry represented on its network and is working on research that evaluates gender differences in self-promotion in profiles.<sup>80</sup>

### **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The internet is reshaping the world of work and is considered one of the most powerful economic resources of the century. The Rockefeller Foundation has been documenting the power of online outsourcing to enable women in India and other countries to earn cash while caring for children and elderly family members.<sup>81</sup> In Egypt, women from traditional households report using online freelancing as an alternative to working in male-dominated workplaces.<sup>82</sup>

Yet the gender digital divide around the world holds back millions of girls and women that lack access to these essential tools and capabilities. There are 25 percent fewer women online than men in developing countries, and in sub-Saharan Africa the gap is nearly 43 percent.<sup>83</sup> This represents 200 million fewer women than men who are online today. Similarly, there are around 300 million fewer women than men who own a mobile phone.<sup>84</sup> As the internet and mobile communication become more indispensable, this gender gap is exacerbating other inequalities.<sup>85</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** Through partnerships with global and local organizations, companies can pool resources and expertise to tackle the digital divide. An example of this is the Women and the Web Alliance, a public-private partnership among USAID, NetHope, Intel Corporation, World Pulse, World Vision, UN Women, and Women in Technology in Nigeria.<sup>86</sup> It seeks to address the internet gender gap by bringing more than 600,000 young women online in Nigeria and Kenya in the next 3 years. It grew out of Intel's She Will Connect program, which empowers women through digital literacy training, gender-relevant content, and access to online peer networks.<sup>87</sup>

### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Addressing gender gaps in skills and knowledge is critical to addressing talent pipeline shortages that many industry experts claim make it difficult to hire women. Although educational attainment is improving, women still make up at least two-thirds of illiterate adults.<sup>88</sup> This prevents them from harnessing the opportunities presented by the ICT industry—as employees as well as users. Women are also noticeably absent in science and technology in higher education. In middle school in the United States, 74 percent of girls express interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs, but when

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<sup>80</sup> Murthy, 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Rockefeller Foundation, Impact Sourcing, [www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/initiatives/impact-sourcing/](http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-work/initiatives/impact-sourcing/).

<sup>82</sup> Imaizumi and Kagundu, 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Intel Corporation, Dalberg Global Development Advisors, and World Pulse, "Women and the Web," 2012.

<sup>84</sup> GSMA Development Fund, The Cherie Blair Foundation, and Vital Wave Consulting, 2010.

<sup>85</sup> Intel Corporation, Dalberg Global Development Advisors, and World Pulse, "Women and the Web," 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Women and the Web Alliance, 2015. [www.womenandtheweballiance.org/](http://www.womenandtheweballiance.org/).

<sup>87</sup> Intel, She Will Connect. [www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/technology-in-education/she-will-connect-program-close-gender-gap-video.html](http://www.intel.com/content/www/us/en/technology-in-education/she-will-connect-program-close-gender-gap-video.html).

<sup>88</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2015. UIS Fact Sheet: Adult and Youth Literacy. No.32. UNESCO Institute for Statistics: Montreal, Canada.

choosing a college major, less than 1 percent of high school girls select computer science.<sup>89</sup> Today only 18 percent of all computer-science graduates are women, compared to 37 percent in 1984.<sup>90</sup>

Social stigma and cultural norms about the role and abilities of women in science and technology serve as barriers that have long-lasting effects on women's confidence and ability to succeed. Research has shown that girls from countries where gender equity is more prevalent are more likely to perform better on mathematics assessment tests. Yet, schools, teachers, and families in many countries do not place a high value on girls learning math.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, many women face cultural stigma that views the internet as an exclusively men's domain.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Investments.** Investments in programs and organizations that provide computer-science education for girls can help build the confidence, networks, and skills of the next generation. Girls Who Code is a non-profit organization that aims to educate, inspire, and equip high-school girls with the skills and resources to pursue opportunities in computing fields. The organizations' supporting partners and sponsors include AT&T, Google.org, the Verizon Wireless Foundation, and the Adobe Foundation, among others in the ICT industry. More than 20 leading technology companies have pledged to share paid internships and other opportunities with alumnae of Girls Who Code.<sup>92</sup>

**Advocacy.** Companies can also use their reach and influence with customers to promote greater investment in and awareness of key issues facing women. Intel is a founding partner of the Girl Rising campaign, a powerful advocacy campaign that uses film and other tools, such as educational and advocacy videos, screening guides and a free standards-aligned school curriculum to raise awareness and inspire action and investment in girls education. Intel shares some of the tools through its own media channels and continues to deepen the impact of the campaign through the Girl Rising ENGAGE collaboration with USAID.<sup>93</sup>

### **SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CHILDCARE**

The burden of unpaid care work, including childcare, affects women along the entire industry value chain. The ability to balance demands at home and the rising cost of childcare for employees and supply chain workers places considerable strain on women. In countries with limited social protections, such as parental leave policies and childcare support, the strain can be particularly difficult. While flexible work policies and remote connectivity tools are increasingly common in the industry, more attention is needed to change internal culture to make using these resources more acceptable and accessible to all employees, male and female, and at all levels including part-time and contract employees.

Employee health and well-being continues to be an issue for workers in the supply chain. In China, some reports show that very few female factory workers have access to pension, medical, and unemployment insurance.<sup>94</sup> After a rash of worker suicides in electronics factories in China a few years ago, companies and suppliers have been investing in improved living conditions for migrant workers, including various on-site social benefits, employee assistance programs, and grievance mechanisms.

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<sup>89</sup> Girls Who Code, <http://girlswhocode.com/about-us/#section4>.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Else-Quest and Hyde, 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Girls Who Code, <http://girlswhocode.com/about-us/#section4>.

<sup>93</sup> Girl Rising, <http://girlrising.com/>.

<sup>94</sup> PRI, 2013.



### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**People.** Corporate policies that provide critical benefits to women and men can not only address the practical challenges of balancing work and home life duties but also nurture a more family-friendly work environment. In an attempt to attract the best talent and retain more female employees, a flurry of companies—including Google, Facebook, Yahoo!, and Netflix—expanded their paid parental leave policies in the last couple of years. Netflix allows any parent to take unlimited paid leave in the first year a child is born or adopted, and Facebook provides 4 months paid leave and US\$4,000 in “baby cash” to new parents.<sup>95</sup> On-site childcare or reduced fees for community childcare facilities are also increasingly common. Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), which has more than 20,000 employees in India, has a five-year contract with a well-established childcare provider to develop an on-site childcare facility on its campus in the Madras Export Processing Zone in Tambaram.<sup>96</sup>

### **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY FORMATION**

Women's health depends on their ability to access credible information and quality services. For workers in the electronics industry supply chain, reproductive health is a serious concern. The majority of factory workers are young female migrants with limited education, and many of them suffer from a range of ailments. The standard of factory clinic support varies significantly between factories and few provide adequate health training for women workers.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, many women are not aware of their rights when pregnant, and policies and laws, if they do exist, are not always enforced by supervisors. For these women and millions of others the ICT industry touches, the internet and other technologies hold the hope of overcoming obstacles of distance, education level, and cultural stigma that prevent women from making informed choices about their reproductive health.

### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Purchasing Power.** Harnessing the relationship with suppliers to improve the health of female workers in the supply chain is essential to maximizing their potential. HP works with BSR's HERproject to help advance the reproductive health of women in its global supply chain through workplace-based education and access programs. It uses its relationships with suppliers to engage with female factory workers and gain the buy-in of factory management.<sup>98</sup> Qualcomm, through its Wireless Reach initiative, is also collaborating with the HERproject to introduce a 3G mobile version of the workplace-based program and strengthen access to health information and services for female manufacturing workers in China.<sup>99</sup>

**Brands and Products.** Through “mHealth” and other mobile-based technologies, companies are helping strengthen women's access to critical health information and services. Through the services provided by internet.org—a partnership between seven technology companies—women can access the Asikana-built Women's Rights Application (WRAPP), which provides women's health and legal information in Zambia.<sup>100</sup> The WRAPP service is complemented by two other services geared to women: Facts for Life,

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<sup>95</sup> Carms, 2013.

<sup>96</sup> *The Hindu*, 2014.

<sup>97</sup> BSR, 2006.

<sup>98</sup> Prophet, 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Covell, 2014.

<sup>100</sup> “WRAPP,” AsikanaNetwork, [www.zamrize.org/wrapp/](http://www.zamrize.org/wrapp/).

a UNICEF program, provides child-raising information for families while Mobile Alliance for Maternal Action delivers health information to new and expectant mothers.<sup>101</sup>

## FREEDOM FROM THE RISK OF VIOLENCE

Harassment and violence against women are also a growing concern for the ICT industry as more women challenge gender norms and connect online, making them the target of acts of violence. A recent Pew research study found that 25 percent of young women online have been sexually harassed and 26 percent have experienced stalking. Moreover, Pew found that women overall are disproportionately targeted by the most severe forms of online abuse, including doxxing<sup>102</sup> and violent threats.<sup>103</sup>

Beyond the internet, sexual harassment and gender-based violence are also concerning for employees and supply chain workers in the industry. It is also endemic in many countries where ICT suppliers and some companies operate. A survey conducted by China's Academy of Social Sciences in 2010 showed that 40 percent of women employed in foreign-owned enterprises or joint ventures had been sexually harassed, and that figure rose to 70 percent in the service sector.<sup>104</sup> Other studies have demonstrated similar results.<sup>105</sup> A 2010 survey of 600 female employees in India's IT and outsourcing industries found that 88 percent had faced some form of sexual harassment at work. In most cases, the perpetrator was a superior at work, according to the survey conducted by the Centre for Transforming India, a Delhi-based non-governmental organization.<sup>106</sup>

How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Brands and Products.** Establishing policies and mechanisms to prevent, identify, and respond to acts of sexual harassment and abuse through the internet are essential to ensuring women remain safe, their rights are respected, and technology is used to advance positive gender relations. Twitter's Rules and Terms of Service seek to create a safe environment while maintaining the diversity and openness of the Twitter community. To address harassment targeting women specifically, Twitter partnered with the NGO Women, Action, and the Media, to create a mechanism to report gender-based threats and abuse.<sup>107</sup>

**Partnerships.** Companies can also partner with local governments to provide critical and convenient services to women at risk of violence or abuse. For example, the Vodafone Foundation and Thames Valley Partnership are helping women victims of domestic abuse to reach emergency services through the TecSOS service. In the U.K., it has now been adopted by around half of the country's police forces, whose response times have improved by an estimated 11 percent.<sup>108</sup>

## VOICE IN SOCIETY AND POLICY INFLUENCE

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<sup>101</sup> Rosen, 2014.

<sup>102</sup> This is the practice of collecting personal and private information, including home addresses and national identity numbers. The data are often released publicly against a person's wishes.

<sup>103</sup> Duggan, 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Cheung, 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Up to 70 percent of women workers in Guangzhou's factories have been sexually harassed, a survey by a labor rights group in the city has found. The problem is so serious that 15 percent of victims felt they had no option but to leave their job to get away from their harasser.

<sup>106</sup> Centre for Transforming India, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Women, Action, & the Media, 2014.

<sup>108</sup> Vodafone Group. 2016. Women - Our Approach. [www.vodafone.com/content/sustainabilityreport/2014/index/transformationalsolutions/women.html](http://www.vodafone.com/content/sustainabilityreport/2014/index/transformationalsolutions/women.html). Accessed January 21, 2016.

In many societies, women are expected to remain silent in debate, denied the right of consent and degraded when they speak up. Digital technologies hold the possibility that larger numbers of women and girls can not only receive information and ideas but also convey them.<sup>109</sup> This can help women to participate and shape debate and influence policymaking. The internet has already proven to be a powerful tool for women's movements to amplify their messages, strengthen their networks, and create policy change. However, just as easily as industry tools can enhance women's voices, they can also serve to repress and reinforce gender stereotypes if proper precautions to protect user privacy and security are not put in place.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** The Global Fund for Women's IGNITE campaign and media project, sponsored by Symantec, explores the roles of science and technology in advancing gender equality. The project features stories of women and girls who are leading and innovating in science, technology, engineering, and math and advocates for women's and girls' increased access to and control of technologies. Symantec plays an important role as co-curator of IGNITE's Spark Stories, which celebrate women, girls, and men who are advancing gender equality in science and technology.<sup>110</sup>

### **FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT**

In many countries, women's mobility is restricted by law and/or in practice. Social norms, available modes of transportation, and safety concerns play a role, as do legal restrictions. Seventeen countries have legal restrictions on women's ability to travel freely outside the home and 23 have restrictions on women's ability to apply for a passport.<sup>111</sup> The growth of ICT has enabled more women to circumvent or overcome physical mobility barriers by accessing information and economic opportunities online. Yet the industry can also play a role in making travel safer, easier, and more socially acceptable for women. This is particularly important as a growing number of people move to cities, where women are at a higher risk of harassment in public places.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Brands and Products.** Several mobile applications have been developed to tackle women's safety in Indian cities. Safecity provides a platform for people to share their personal stories of sexual harassment and abuse in public spaces. This data, which may be anonymous, gets aggregated as hot spots on a map indicating trends at a local level. The idea is to make this data useful for individuals, local communities, and local administrations for social and systemic change for safer cities.<sup>112</sup>

### **HEALTHCARE**

The healthcare sector consists of companies engaged in manufacturing medical equipment, supplies, and pharmaceuticals as well as the delivery of healthcare services.

Women as employees. Harnessing the knowledge and skills of women, who make up the majority of employees in the healthcare sector, is essential to bringing innovative and effective health products to

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<sup>109</sup> Cummings and O'Neill, 2015.

<sup>110</sup> IGNITE: Women Fueling Science & Technology, <http://ignite.globalfundforwomen.org/>.

<sup>111</sup> World Bank, "Women, Business and the Law 2016," 2015.

<sup>112</sup> Safecity. "About Safecity," <http://safecity.in/about/>.

market.<sup>113</sup> Research already shows that women's work contributes around US\$3 trillion to the global healthcare industry each year.<sup>114</sup>

Women as producers, suppliers, and distributors. Women are critical players across the entire healthcare value chain, including in service delivery, R&D, and manufacturing. Women represent more than 70 percent of nurses and a growing number of other health professionals.<sup>115</sup> The WHO anticipates a shortage of 12.9 million health-care workers globally by 2035.<sup>116</sup> This makes recruiting and training women in healthcare delivery particularly important for the sector to meet the evolving health needs of populations around the world.

Women as consumers and users. Women make upwards of 80 percent of all the healthcare decisions for themselves, their children, and their families in some countries.<sup>117</sup> This makes women key customers and influencers for the healthcare industry. Moreover, these decisions affect individual and community health and well-being, and also contribute to workforce productivity, all essential aspects of building strong and stable economies.

Strengthening access to high-quality healthcare is itself an essential building block for women's economic empowerment. Women continue to face barriers to accessing products and services to meet their basic and distinct health needs and achieving their full potential as economic actors and contributors to society. Many healthcare companies have made ambitious commitments to advance women's health and gender equality as part of the global SDGs (many under its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals). While many of these commitments have originated as philanthropic investments, a growing number of companies are putting a broader suite of core business assets, including their policy influence and R&D departments, to work to make progress for women employees and those they impact along the value chain.

## **ACCESS TO SAFE AND EQUITABLE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

While female employees have made great advances in professional roles in pharmaceutical and other healthcare organizations, women face vulnerabilities as frontline health workers and barriers to assuming leadership roles in the industry. Despite making up the majority of the healthcare workforce globally, women represent only 21 percent of executives and 21 percent of board members at Fortune 500 healthcare companies.<sup>118</sup> There is only one woman CEO of an S&P 500 healthcare company.<sup>119</sup> Research indicates that gender discrimination persists in the industry, but that it is often subtle and embedded in organizational structures, practices, and cultural assumptions.<sup>120</sup>

The vast majority of frontline health workers are women, including many informal, community, and home care workers. In many countries, these workers are often unrecognized as skilled workers and

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<sup>113</sup> WHO, Gender and health workforce statistics, 2008.

<sup>114</sup> Langer, 2015.

<sup>115</sup> WHO, 2008.

<sup>116</sup> Campbell, 2013.

<sup>117</sup> U.S. Department of Labor Employee Benefits Security Administration, "Fact Sheet: General Facts on Women and Job Based Health," 2013.

<sup>118</sup> Tecco, 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Catalyst, Women CEOs of the S&P 500, [www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500](http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500).

<sup>120</sup> Wang and Jacobson, 2015.



undervalued. The WHO has found that, in many cases, these mainly female frontline health workers compensate for the shortcomings of health systems through individual adjustments, at times to the detriment of their own health and livelihoods. These fields often place considerable strain on women's personal safety, emotional well-being, and family relationships.<sup>121</sup> Occupational stress and burnout due to long work hours and high patient loads, alongside exposure to infectious diseases and hazardous substances, are well-known in the industry.<sup>122</sup> Studies in the United States have shown that women healthcare workers are also more prone to musculoskeletal injury (caused by physically demanding job tasks such as lifting and moving patients) and mental health issues.<sup>123</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**People.** Novartis was one of the first companies to commit to calculating and paying a living wage to associates globally. Recognizing the challenge of developing a living for diverse geographies with different costs of living, the company, in partnership with BSR, developed customized calculations for countries. The company conducts an annual review of salaries for all associates and adjusts those that fall below the living-wage level.<sup>124</sup>

**Brands and Products.** Developing medical products and devices that ensure the safety of medical workers is essential to creating a healthy work environment for women. Companies like BD have been leading the development of easy-to-use injection devices designed to protect healthcare workers from needlestick injuries and exposure to blood-borne pathogens.<sup>125</sup> The company has also built an education center to support continuing education for healthcare professional and providers to ensure worker safety.<sup>126</sup>

### **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Women face significant barriers to access high-quality health services. This includes factors such as affordability, availability, awareness, and in some cases, cultural norms and power dynamics. Although women make the majority of health decisions for families, high rates of poverty among women around the world serves as a significant barrier to access. In the United States, one in seven women and nearly half of all families led by single mothers are poor.<sup>127</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Brands and Products.** Establishing medicine pricing schemes that focus on the buyer's ability to pay is an important part of making medicines affordable in developing countries. Gilead, AbbVie, and Novo Nordisk have developed both inter-country and intra-country equitable pricing strategies for certain products. Gilead also discloses volumes of sales and prices for relevant products.<sup>128</sup> GSK ensures that its patented medicines for diseases such as asthma, hepatitis B, and malaria sold in low-income countries sell for no more than 25 percent of developed-world prices. The company has also committed to provide

<sup>121</sup> George, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> Ruotsalainen et al., 2014.

<sup>123</sup> Ngan et al., 2014.

<sup>124</sup> Novartis, A Living Wage, [www.novartis.com/about-us/corporate-responsibility/our-people-communities/living-wage](http://www.novartis.com/about-us/corporate-responsibility/our-people-communities/living-wage).

<sup>125</sup> BD, Healthcare Worker Safety. [www.bd.com/safety/](http://www.bd.com/safety/).

<sup>126</sup> Ezell, "BD Diagnostics Launches Turnkey Continuing Education Program for Clinical Laboratories."

<sup>127</sup> Women's National Law Center, Data on Poverty & Income, 2015.

<sup>128</sup> Access to Medicine Index 2014: Pricing, Manufacturing & Distribution, 2014.

GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance, with more than 850 million vaccine doses at reduced prices to help protect 300 million children in the developing world by 2024. This improves access for women, for whom affordability represents a significant barrier.<sup>129</sup>

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The WHO estimates that an additional 4.3 million health workers are needed worldwide.<sup>130</sup> Yet there remains a lack of investments sufficient to build women's knowledge, skills, and clinical experience to meet global healthcare's growing technical demands and evolving health needs. Despite significant advances in educational attainment, women continue to represent a small percentage of graduates in science-related fields. Women are also more likely than men to be stereotyped as caring health personnel (rather than technical experts), which can hinder their professional advancement and limit investments in much-needed skill development. Moreover, low-quality health systems and infrastructure in many countries, particularly in the developing world, impact women disproportionately, as they represent the majority of frontline health workers.

### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** Equipping local health educators with key skills and knowledge can help strengthen awareness of critical health issues, particularly in rural communities, and create professional opportunities for women. As part of its Arogya Parivar for-profit social business, Novartis recruits and trains community members in remote villages, typically women, to become "health educators." These educators inform communities about health, disease prevention, and the benefits of seeking timely care. Local teams work with doctors to organize health camps in villages, mobile clinics that provide access to screening, diagnosis, and treatment. The company recently expanded the program from India to Kenya, Indonesia, and Vietnam.<sup>131</sup>

**Investments.** A number of companies recognize that investing in national health systems is essential for improving access to higher-quality healthcare and medicine. Since 2009, GSK has reinvested 20 percent of its profits from sales in least-developed countries to improve the healthcare infrastructure in those countries through training frontline health workers. The program includes strong partnerships with NGOs such as Save the Children, Amref Health Africa, and CARE International, who work with country ministries of health to deliver the program on the ground.<sup>132</sup>

## SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CHILDCARE

While life expectancy is higher for women than men in most countries, the WHO reports that various factors contribute to a lower quality of life for women.<sup>133</sup> Cardiovascular disease, often thought to be a problem for men, is the number one killer of women globally.<sup>134</sup> The issues go beyond access to medicine. Gender gaps remain in access to nutritious food and high-quality education, exacerbating many of the health challenges facing women later in life. Moreover, the double burden of work and household responsibilities, including childcare, affects women's well-being.

<sup>129</sup> GSK, Access to healthcare, [www.gsk.com/en-gb/responsibility/health-for-all/access-to-healthcare/](http://www.gsk.com/en-gb/responsibility/health-for-all/access-to-healthcare/).

<sup>130</sup> WHO. Education and training, [www.who.int/hrh/education/en/](http://www.who.int/hrh/education/en/).

<sup>131</sup> Novartis, Novartis Social Ventures, [www.novartis.com/about-us/corporate-responsibility/access-healthcare/novartis-social-ventures](http://www.novartis.com/about-us/corporate-responsibility/access-healthcare/novartis-social-ventures).

<sup>132</sup> GSK, Our commitment to sustainable development. [www.gsk.com/media/748536/sustainable-development.pdf](http://www.gsk.com/media/748536/sustainable-development.pdf).

<sup>133</sup> WHO. "10 Facts on Women's Health," [www.who.int/gender/documents/10facts\\_womens\\_health\\_en.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/gender/documents/10facts_womens_health_en.pdf?ua=1).

<sup>134</sup> WHO, The Global Burden of Disease 2004 Update, 2008.

The healthcare industry has been ranked consistently high in providing attractive benefits to women. In the United States, healthcare companies make up most of the highest-ranking companies for working moms, according to Working Mother.<sup>135</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**People.** Many healthcare companies have been strengthening employee benefits alongside investments in employee health and wellness. Johnson & Johnson has expanded access to its Culture of Health programs from only the United States to now reaching its employees around the globe, ensuring all have the same access to high-quality health programs and services. The company has also embarked on a work-life effectiveness program to improve employee well-being by addressing issues such as child and elder care.<sup>136</sup>

### **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY FORMATION**

Maternal mortality rates remain stubbornly high, especially in rural areas and among poor and less-educated communities. Among girls aged between 15 and 19, complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth are the second leading cause of death.<sup>137</sup> Unmet needs for contraception result in 54 million unintended pregnancies and 16 million unsafe abortions, resulting in 79,000 maternal deaths.<sup>138</sup> Multiple layers of stigma and discrimination, as well as R&D gaps, impact women's ability to exercise their reproductive rights and access gynecological and obstetrics services. Studies show that hemorrhage, sepsis, and hypertensive disorders are responsible for more than half of all maternal deaths worldwide. Strengthening skilled care at childbirth and access to emergency obstetric care could address many of these issues.<sup>139</sup>

There are also substantial gaps in R&D spending on reproductive and maternal health issues in developing countries. In 2013, maternal health received just US\$88 million, compared to US\$3.2 billion in R&D spending on neglected diseases, including malaria and tuberculosis.<sup>140</sup> This market failure is the result of many factors, including regulatory restrictions and litigation risk, as well as incentives that lead companies to shy away from investments in maternal health R&D.<sup>141</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Investments.** Overcoming access barriers requires innovative products and business models. Merck for Mothers is a 10-year, US\$500 million initiative focused on improving the health and well-being of mothers during pregnancy and childbirth. The focus is on identifying and testing new solutions to maternal health tailored to local contexts. In some countries this involves telemedicine and social franchising, while in others it focuses on overcoming common barriers to care, such as cost, transportation, and limited

<sup>135</sup> Working Mother, Best Companies, [www.workingmother.com/best-companies](http://www.workingmother.com/best-companies).

<sup>136</sup> Johnson & Johnson, 2014 Citizenship & Sustainability Report, 2014.

<sup>137</sup> WHO. "Adolescent pregnancy," [www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs364/en/](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs364/en/).

<sup>138</sup> Singh and Darroch, 2012.

<sup>139</sup> Say et al., 2014.

<sup>140</sup> Moran et al., 2014.

<sup>141</sup> Urlings et al., 2015.

supplies.<sup>142</sup> Merck & Co. is also developing contraceptive methods that are suitable for use in developing countries, including a heat-stable contraceptive ring and an intrauterine system.<sup>143</sup>

**Partnerships.** By expanding access to contraceptives, companies can help strengthen women's control over family planning decisions. In 2013, Bayer partnered with The Clinton Health Access Initiative to reduce the price for its long-acting (up to 5 years) reversible contraceptive implant Jadelle by more than 50 percent, from US\$18 to US\$8.50 per implant. As part of the initiative, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided a market guarantee that assured funding for at least 27 million implants for women in developing countries over six years. The company is also working with USAID to make its oral contraceptive more affordable in 11 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Bayer has agreed on a sale price with USAID that is above the public-sector level and below commercial prices, which is intended to help sustain the approach beyond USAID funding.<sup>144</sup>

### FREEDOM FROM THE RISK OF VIOLENCE

Across the globe, female healthcare workers are particularly vulnerable to harassment and abuse. In the United States, more than one-third of female physicians say that they have been sexually harassed.<sup>145</sup> Studies point to the fact that many of these workers are coming up against conservative gender norms in their homes, in public spaces, and through their health work.<sup>146</sup> Power dynamics in some large institutions where male doctors enforce hierarchies can also contribute to hostile work environments.

Aggressive and confused patients can put healthcare workers at particular risk of harassment and violence. Women working in healthcare delivery also tend to work non-traditional hours, often traveling alone, which makes them more vulnerable.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**People.** As a critical entry point for victims of violence, the healthcare care industry plays an important role in preventing, monitoring, and responding to cases of gender-based violence. Organizations such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) are helping shift societal understanding of gender-based violence from a law-enforcement issue to a public-health concern. UNFPA and the Women Against Violence Europe organization offer resource and training packages to service providers and decision makers in the health sector to help integrate gender-based violence response within the health system, including referral pathways.<sup>147</sup>

### VOICE IN SOCIETY AND POLICY INFLUENCE

Ensuring women have a say in the issues that matter to them is critical to economic empowerment. Nowhere is this more important than with issues that concern women's health and safety and where women continue to be silenced, ignored, or discredited. While social media platforms and technologies are helping, much more needs to be done to ensure women's voices are heard on matters such as family planning, access to contraception, maternity benefits, and vaccinations, among other issues.

<sup>142</sup> Merck for Mothers, <http://merckformothers.com/>.

<sup>143</sup> Merck, Access to Reproductive Health. [www.merckresponsibility.com/access-to-health/womens-health/access-to-reproductive-health/](http://www.merckresponsibility.com/access-to-health/womens-health/access-to-reproductive-health/).

<sup>144</sup> Access to Medicine Foundation, 2015.

<sup>145</sup> Committee on Pediatric Workforce, 2006.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> UNFPA and Wage, 2014.



Women's representation is also lacking in clinical trials that affect women's health outcomes and innovation.<sup>148</sup> The result is women experiencing more severe side effects from some new treatments—one study found that females have a 1.5-1.7-fold greater risk of developing an adverse drug reaction—which in turn has caused several drugs to be withdrawn from the market over the last two decades.<sup>149</sup> Experts in this field argue that including women in research is not just a matter of enrolling women in clinical studies, but “requires changing norms of how research is designed, long before a volunteer signs up for a study.”<sup>150</sup> Greater awareness of the gender gaps in research has led governments to put in place new regulations that advocate for the participation of women and the analysis of results through a gender lens.<sup>151</sup> However, barriers remain to women's participation including insufficient awareness, poor access to healthcare, inadequate transportation, and lack of childcare. Additionally, researchers consider women who could potentially become pregnant during a trial period a vulnerable group and exclude them from participation.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Advocacy.** Eli Lilly has committed to creating diverse representation in clinical trials as a way to gain insight into making medicines that match the populations who are likely to use them. Lilly has nearly 450 diverse clinical trial sites in the United States and is also training minority physicians to conduct clinical trials.<sup>152</sup> Patient Access to Cancer care Excellence (PACE), Lilly Oncology's global initiative to encourage public policies and healthcare decisions to accelerate the development of new cancer treatments, has been working to attract more women through education among minorities and women about clinical trials.<sup>153</sup>

### **FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT**

Women's ability to access health services is severely impacted by their mobility. Rural areas in particular lack sophisticated health facilities, equipment, and healthcare specialists. Distance and poor transport make it difficult for women to access information and services, especially in urgent-care situations. In some regions, women's movement is restricted by cultural norms or misconceptions about modern medicine. While investments in telemedicine, mobile applications, and other technologies are helping provide high-quality healthcare to women in underserved areas, it is equally important to focus on education for both male and female populations to remove restrictions on women's mobility.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** Through the British charity Colalife, pharmaceutical companies have joined forces with a range of partners to bring medicine to low-resource areas by tapping the extensive distribution chains of Coca-Cola and other commodity producers. Johnson & Johnson and one of its pharmaceuticals companies, Janssen, played a key role in the development, design, and distribution of the Kit Yamoyo, an anti-diarrhea kit, to children in Zambia. The kit includes oral rehydration salt sachets, pediatric zinc to strengthen children's immune systems, and soap to promote handwashing. The packaging is also designed to help parents measure the right amounts of water to add when giving the

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<sup>148</sup> Johnson, 2014.

<sup>149</sup> Coakley et al., 2012.

<sup>150</sup> National Institute of Health Office of Research on Women's Health, 2015.

<sup>151</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "The Inclusion of Women in Clinical Trials," 2015

<sup>152</sup> Lilly, "Diversity in Clinical Trials," [www.lilly.com/about/diversity/marketplace/clinical-trials/clinical-trials.aspx](http://www.lilly.com/about/diversity/marketplace/clinical-trials/clinical-trials.aspx).

<sup>153</sup> O'Connor, 2014.

medicines. Additional funders, including Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), DfID, and GSK/Save the Children (through the ColaLife Innovation Award), are now supporting the scale-up plan of the program.<sup>154</sup>

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

The financial services industry consists of companies engaged in commercial and investment banking, insurance, and financial advisory services.

Women as employees. Women comprise just over half of all those employed in financial and insurance services in 12 OECD countries.<sup>155</sup> They are a tremendous source of talent that will be critical for creating, marketing and distributing financial products and services to an increasingly diverse customer base.

Women as producers, suppliers, and distributors. Global banks and insurance companies have far-reaching value chains that include market research, product design/development, and distribution. By providing equal opportunities for women to engage in all aspects of this chain, companies have the opportunity both to empower women as industry experts and reach and serve women customers more effectively.

Women as consumers. Women are a large and growing market for financial products and services. In India and China alone, women's earnings will increase from US\$1.6 trillion in 2010 to US\$5 trillion in 2020.<sup>156</sup> Women own more than 30 percent of registered businesses worldwide,<sup>157</sup> and more and more women are economic heads of households. In the United States, women are the primary or sole income earners in 40 percent of households with children.<sup>158</sup> In 17 other countries, women outnumber men as primary income earners.<sup>159</sup> Women are also motivated to protect their wealth. By 2030, the annual premium value of the insurance purchased by women is predicted to grow by six to nine times its 2013 value.<sup>160</sup>

For the past two decades, the financial services industry has slowly but steadily increased its efforts to expand women's access to and use of financial products and services. These efforts have largely focused on boosting women's financial literacy, providing a wider and more accessible array of savings, credit, and insurance options, expanding mobile and electronic banking, and mentoring women who run small and medium-sized businesses. Appreciating the gains already achieved, many in the industry now ask how to expand and improve their efforts—not only to reach more women but also to reach them with ever-more-valuable products and services. Doing so will require innovating in several key areas with an eye to overcoming some of the deep-seated challenges women face in accumulating, controlling, and managing economic resources.

## ACCESS TO SAFE AND EQUITABLE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

<sup>154</sup> ColaLife, [www.colalife.org/about/colalife-about/](http://www.colalife.org/about/colalife-about/).

<sup>155</sup> International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT Female share of employment by economic activity (%).

<sup>156</sup> From "The \$10 Trillion Prize: Captivating the Newly Affluent in China and India." Boston Consulting Group. 2012, as cited in James Medaglio, *Womenomics: The Global Female Consumer*, 2015.

<sup>157</sup> IFC, *Banking on Women: Changing the Face of the Global Economy*, 2013.

<sup>158</sup> Pew Research Center, *Breadwinner Moms*, 2013.

<sup>159</sup> International Finance Corporation and AXA, 2015.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

By providing formal wages, statutory leave, health insurance, maternity and other social protection benefits, banks and insurance companies have long been a reliable source of good-quality, formal employment for millions of women globally.<sup>161</sup> Women employees, however, are concentrated in the lower occupational categories of the industry and remain vastly underrepresented in leadership and management roles. According to one analysis, women in the United States are less than half as likely as men to progress from a mid-level to a senior-level position in the finance industry, and the probability is only marginally higher among U.K. banks and insurers.<sup>162</sup>

In the United States, women make up 75 percent of financial service employees but hold only 12 percent of executive positions in the top 50 banks.<sup>163</sup> The notable absence of women leaders in the finance and banking sector may have far-reaching supply-side ramifications, including contributing to the ineffective design and marketing of products to and for women customers. Women's continued predominance in lower echelons of the banking hierarchy also fuels a significant gender pay gap for the industry as a whole.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**People.** Many companies across sectors have begun to use unconscious bias training to help employees overcome unintentional stereotyping that can lead managers to hire, promote, or manage people differently. Barclay's Bank, a founding supporter of the UN Women HeforShe Campaign, has incorporated this training for managing directors since 2013 as part of its efforts to increase the representation of women in senior leadership by one percentage point a year. In addition, Barclay's requires at least 25 percent gender diversity on short lists for all director and managing-director positions and all review panels for these roles must include senior-level women.<sup>164</sup>

Making employment opportunities highly attractive to qualified women executives can also improve a company's ability to compete for talent. Luring and retaining female talent through competitive benefits packages has worked well for companies such as ICICI—India's second-largest and fastest-growing bank. Competition for women executives is fierce in India, and ICICI competes by offering six months of paid maternity leave and additional paid leave available for childcare, fertility treatment, and adoption. ICICI is known for having women in key senior leadership positions and prides itself on offering a supportive environment for all parents to balance career success with domestic responsibilities.<sup>165</sup>

### **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Women's wealth accumulation can catalyze economic growth for entire countries, yet unmet demand for financial products and services is most acute among women. Only 47 percent of women worldwide have an account at a formal financial institution, compared with 55 percent of men. In South Asia, the gender disparity in use of financial services is most striking: only 25 percent of women, versus 41 percent of men, have a bank account.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>161</sup> ILO, Decent Work. [www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm). According to the International Labor Organization, decent work is characterized by a fair income, security and social protection.

<sup>162</sup> Oliver Wyman, 2014.

<sup>163</sup> McCarter, 2006.

<sup>164</sup> Jes Staley profile as a HeforShe impact champion, [www.heforshe.org/en/impact/jes-staley](http://www.heforshe.org/en/impact/jes-staley).

<sup>165</sup> Elliot, 2006.

<sup>166</sup> World Bank, "Who are the Unbanked? Uncovering the Financial Inclusion Gap." 2012.

Access to credit is similarly constrained. On average only about 10 percent of women entrepreneurs have access to the capital needed to grow their businesses.<sup>167</sup> This typically results from a profound lack of collateral. Patriarchal legal systems the world over have denied women rights to own independently and control land and other assets within their marriages, to retain assets upon divorce, or inherit directly from their spouse. While these discriminatory laws are quickly being rewritten in many societies, in many other places customary practices continue to be the norm, and banking procedures have been painfully slow to transition.

Complicating matters, women-owned businesses in many low- and middle-income countries tend to be smaller, home-based businesses, which are categorized by banks as higher-risk and lower-return investments. As a result, women-run businesses are offered loans with higher interest rates and the requirement for more collateral. In addition, loan officers may be much less familiar with women business-owners as a client group. Implicit biases may include the perception that women entrepreneurs are less skilled, business-savvy, or experienced. Without specific training to counteract these biases, discrimination persists, with profound ripple effects. When women come to feel that formal financial institutions are not for them, they are less able to acquire capital in sufficient amounts to grow their businesses.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** Unfortunately, many commercial banks are reluctant to absorb the risks involved in loaning to small-scale enterprises owned by women. The International Finance Corporation has bridged that gap by partnering with banks to reduce these risks, improve banks' ability to identify and underwrite SMEs, and strengthen their financial infrastructure. In 2006, the IFC loaned US\$15 million to Nigeria's Access Bank to establish a new line of credit and business services for women entrepreneurs. IFC provided technical assistance to the bank to develop a range of products and services that could overcome many of the obstacles women entrepreneurs faced in obtaining credit, including more flexible collateral options and skills building. Over three years it disbursed more than US\$35 million in loans and trained more than 650 women entrepreneurs. The bank's reputation improved, and it has expanded its women's banking program in the Gambia and Rwanda. Meanwhile, other banks have established similar programs.

More recently, Access Bank, the IFC, and Coca-Cola have partnered in a US\$100 million, three-year joint initiative to provide access to finance for thousands of women entrepreneurs in Africa and other emerging markets. IFC has loaned funds to Access Bank Nigeria, among other banks, to provide financing and business skills training to SMEs that are owned or operated by women entrepreneurs in Coca-Cola's value chain.<sup>168</sup> Similarly, the IFC has partnered with the Goldman Sachs Foundation to build on the 10,000 Women entrepreneurship training and mentoring program by establishing The Women Entrepreneurs Opportunity Facility, which will raise up to US\$600 million in capital through investments from additional public and private co-investors to enable approximately 100,000 women entrepreneurs to access capital.<sup>169</sup>

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

In order for women to access and benefit from financial services and products, the first step is often simply expanding their awareness and knowledge that those products and services exist and how to use

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Audu and McNally, 2010.

<sup>169</sup> Goldman Sachs, "Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women, IFC to Raise Up to \$600 million to Support Women Entrepreneurs," 2014.



them. For some women, this may mean something as simple as receiving training in how to use an ATM, while others can benefit from education about saving and investing for the future. Women entrepreneurs can benefit from business training and ongoing mentorship, while women and girls need the educational foundation upon which to launch a career in the financial services industry. Finally, financial-services employees need training to overcome the unconscious bias that may result in women being provided fewer or substandard banking services than men.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Investments.** Bank of America and the Cherie Blair Foundation have partnered on the Mentoring Women in Business Program. The bank has invested in training 400 women entrepreneurs, who are matched with online mentors, many of them employees of the bank. The mentors use an online platform to connect with and assist entrepreneurs over a one-year period, developing practical skills such as creating business proposals and plans in order to raise capital and managing cash flow and budgets.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, Goldman Sachs' 10,000 Women program aims to improve the skills of 10,000 women entrepreneurs in 56 countries by forging partnerships with leading business schools that helped to create curricula and provide mentorship. Participants reported accelerated business growth and enhanced self-confidence as a result of the program.<sup>171</sup>

**Partnerships.** Voya Financial (formerly ING U.S.) has partnered with the NGO Girls Inc. to launch the Voya-Girls Inc. Investment Challenge to build girls' economic literacy. Ensuring that girls enter adulthood with practical finance-management skills is a public good in its own right; but for the financial services industry, it may also be an investment in improving women's inclusion in the pipeline of talent for investment banking. This program provides girls age 12-18 hands-on investing experience and mentorship. Teams of girls begin with a US\$50,000 pot of money they invest in a diversified portfolio over a three-year period with the help and guidance of trained Girls Inc. staff and Voya Financial employee volunteers.<sup>172</sup>

### **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY FORMATION**

Planning if and when to form a family is fundamental to women's ability to engage in a livelihood, whether through formal employment, entrepreneurship, or informal employment. Lack of family planning and reproductive health information, services, and decision-making power can severely undermine women's economic productivity and career advancement. For adolescent girls and young women especially, unplanned pregnancies can seriously derail their ability to achieve economic independence and can set up a pattern of lifelong economic dependence on men. The financial services industry can do much to help ensure that women's access to and knowledge about financial products and services is accompanied by access to and knowledge about family planning and reproductive health. More cross-industry collaborations are needed between the financial services sector and the healthcare sector; together they can more effectively catalyze women's economic empowerment.

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Investment.** The MasterCard Foundation supports BRAC, an international NGO, to conduct a program in Uganda called Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents (ELA). This program serves girls and young women aged 13 to 21 with a program that combines life-skills training, community participation, and

<sup>170</sup> Bank of America, "Helping empower women entrepreneurs in developing and emerging economies," 2013.

<sup>171</sup> Goldman Sachs, 10,000 Women, [www.goldmansachs.com/citizenship/10000women/about-the-program/index.html?cid=PS\\_01\\_08\\_07\\_00\\_00\\_01\\_sProgram](http://www.goldmansachs.com/citizenship/10000women/about-the-program/index.html?cid=PS_01_08_07_00_00_01_sProgram).

<sup>172</sup> Voya Financial, "Voya Financial : Financial Education," <http://corporate.voya.com/corporate-responsibility/community-investment/financial-education>.

targeted microfinance. The program helps build girls' vocational skills and access to capital while also developing their skills to make informed choices about sex, reproduction, and marriage. The adolescent fertility rate in Uganda is significantly higher than most of sub-Saharan Africa, and early marriage and childbearing are common. An evaluation of the program showed that early marriage dropped by 58 percent and teen pregnancy by 26 percent. Girls' experience of rape dropped by half, and income expenditure (a proxy for increased income) rose by 40 percent.<sup>173</sup>

## **SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CHILDCARE**

Many social factors powerfully inhibit women's economic advancement. The burden of unpaid care work that disproportionately falls on women provides a striking example. Unpaid care work includes child and elder care, care for the sick and disabled, and the full range of domestic household chores. The routine burden of unpaid care means women have less time and energy to invest in their jobs and businesses. This can result in lower labor-force participation among women, as well as women tracking into more informal and less secure types of employment. In many countries, including many developed countries, a shortage of affordable and quality childcare renders many women simply unable to work or relegates them to home-based businesses or livelihoods.

Household emergencies can significantly disrupt or derail women's income-earning potential and throw entire families into income insecurity. The financial-services industry can provide a safety net for women through products such as life, health, and other types of insurance and microinsurance. When it comes to insurance products, recent research conducted by the IFC, the AXA Group, and Accenture reveals that women value insurance products that provide immediate and easy-to-access payouts for the life emergencies they are most likely to experience.<sup>174</sup> These include healthcare coverage for pregnancy, childbirth, and woman-specific cancers, insurance that can defray the cost of caring for elderly and ill family members, insurance against financial ruin from widowhood or divorce (especially in countries where women's property and asset rights are not legally protected or enforced), life insurance benefits that can guarantee education for children, and, for women entrepreneurs, replacement of lost income.<sup>175</sup> Unfortunately, there remains a severe paucity of innovative insurance products designed specifically to meet women's demands.

### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**People.** Many companies are making their workplaces more gender-equitable by experimenting with agile work environments, which include more flexibility in scheduling and location of work. While such arrangements are expected to improve job satisfaction and talent acquisition among women as well as men, such flexibility may be particularly useful to women, who invest more time caring for children. Women's productivity can be greatly improved by access to on-site daycare, working remotely, or scheduling their work around children's daycare or school schedules. For AXA Insurance Company, agile working environments are a priority and a means to support its diversity and inclusion goals. Flextime, telecommuting, and options for working less than 100 percent have reportedly led to improved trust, empowerment, quality, and productivity of its teams.<sup>176</sup>

**Brands and Products.** The self-employed women's association (SEWA) in India provides a range of insurance products through its VimoSEWA insurance cooperative. The products include coverage for life, asset loss, widowhood, personal accident, sickness, and maternity benefits. In 2002, medical insurance

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<sup>173</sup> Maffei, 2015.

<sup>174</sup> International Finance Corporation and AXA, 2015.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> AXA. "Employee Wellbeing and Health & Safety," [www.axa.com/en/responsibility/Employees/employee-wellbeing/](http://www.axa.com/en/responsibility/Employees/employee-wellbeing/).

for husbands was added to the scheme, and in 2003, the scheme extended health insurance coverage to members' children.<sup>177</sup>

### **FREEDOM FROM THE RISK OF VIOLENCE**

Women, like all people, have the right to live a life free of violence and coercion. Globally, one in three women has experienced domestic violence at some point in her life.<sup>178</sup> The experience of physical and emotional violence is a powerful barrier to women's social and economic development.<sup>179</sup> Women who are in violent relationships may find it difficult to obtain or hold a job. Lack of financial literacy and economic dependence may keep women in abusive relationships. And when workplace cultures ignore or condone sexual harassment or even assault, women are deprived of their right to decent and safe work. The financial services industry has an important role to play in ensuring that industry employees have workplaces that are free from harassment and other forms of violence, and that women consumers are aware of and have access to the financial tools and services that they will need to escape violent relationships and build economic independence.

How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** Since 2005, the Allstate Insurance Foundation has invested US\$30 million in national, state and local domestic violence organizations and activities. Its primary partner is the National Network to End Domestic Violence. With the foundation's support, the Network and other organizations have helped more than 100,000 survivors take steps toward financial independence through services like financial education, matched savings programs, job training, and microenterprise services. In addition, The Allstate Foundation has trained more than 3,000 advocates in 900 local programs in 33 states.<sup>180</sup>

### **VOICE IN SOCIETY AND POLICY INFLUENCE**

Women's absence from key forums that shape policy decisions about economic and financial resource allocation can perpetuate gender inequality. The financial-services industry remains overwhelmingly dominated by men in positions of leadership and influence. This is beginning to change: Women now head the U.S. Federal Reserve and the International Monetary Fund. Industry leaders can do more to ensure women's voices are equally represented in influential forums and policy discussions.

How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Advocacy.** Companies can ensure they send women representatives to meetings such as the World Economic Forum and support research on critical topics affecting women's advancement in the industry, as employees as well as consumers. The World Economic Forum seeks to "maximize women's participation in all its activities, including annual meetings, regional events, Global Agenda Councils, and initiatives, drawing from a pool of the highest-level women leaders in business, politics, academia, media, and civil society."<sup>181</sup> The Forum includes The Global Gender Parity Group, which brings together private-sector champions of women's inclusion with leaders in other sectors to encourage commitment and action toward gender parity. The Forum also hosts The Women Leaders Community, which convenes women leaders "from various stakeholder groups participating in World Economic Forum events ... for networking and establishing meaningful dialogue on contemporary issues of relevance."<sup>182</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Vimo SEWA, "SEWA: About Us," [www.sewainsurance.org/aboutus.aspx](http://www.sewainsurance.org/aboutus.aspx).

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Gennari, Arango, and Hidalgo, 2015.

<sup>180</sup> Allstate Foundation, "Domestic Violence: Overview," [www.allstatefoundation.org/domestic\\_violence.html](http://www.allstatefoundation.org/domestic_violence.html).

<sup>181</sup> World Economic Forum, "The Gender Parity Programme," [www.weforum.org/women-leaders-and-gender-parity](http://www.weforum.org/women-leaders-and-gender-parity).

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

## FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

In many cultures and societies, women's mobility is highly constrained. Some women are not allowed to use public transportation, or cannot because of cost or the threat of harassment or violence. Many women are tied to home because of domestic care duties, including childcare. As a result, they cannot attend training or access markets. They must rely on male relatives as intermediaries for accessing financial services and information. There is much the financial services industry can do to support women to overcome these constraints, or, by working within them, to provide improved access to products and services. For example, mobile and electronic financial services represent an enormous opportunity to put power in the hands of women through a cell phone. Similarly, banks can provide mobile services in the form of home visits or other personal outreach by loan officers and customer service agents to provide training, open bank accounts, and collect debt payments. Where cultural taboos restrict women from interacting with men, deploying women sales and customer service agents may be particularly useful.

How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Brands and Products.** Nationwide Microbank (NMB) in Papua New Guinea partners with Digicel, the largest telecommunications company in the country, to run MiCash. According to Women's World Banking, which has studied MiCash, it allows bank customers to use their mobile phones to make deposits and withdrawals and to check balances. Customers can also use MiCash to purchase certain goods and services, process payments, and transfer money. Thirty-seven percent of MiCash clients are women, and the bank is investing in growing women's access. Eighty percent of MiCash customers were previously unbanked.<sup>183</sup>

## CONSUMER PRODUCTS

The consumer products sector includes companies producing and manufacturing finished goods from personal hygiene and household products to apparel, footwear, and toys. In some cases, these companies also have their own retail operations.<sup>184</sup>

Women as employees. Women have a strong presence in the consumer products workforce. Developing an engaged and diverse employee base that reflects rapidly changing consumer demographics is essential to innovation, revenue, and growth.

Women as suppliers, producers, and distributors. Women represent the majority of workers in the supply chain and retail channels for most consumer products industries, making them a powerful source of productivity, operational efficiency, and customer service. In countries like Bangladesh and Cambodia, women make up 80-90 percent of workers in garment manufacturing.<sup>185, 186</sup> Women also have a strong presence in retail. In the United States alone, women represent about half of the more than 3 million retail salespersons.<sup>187</sup>

Women as consumers and users. Women also play key roles as influencers, decision makers, and buyers of consumer goods around the world, controlling about US\$20 trillion in annual consumer

<sup>183</sup> Banthia, 2015.

<sup>184</sup> Note that this definition does not include companies whose primary business is food and beverage.

<sup>185</sup> Better Work, Case Study: Fire and building safety in the ready-made garment sector of Bangladesh, 2014.

<sup>186</sup> Better Work, "Women, Work & Development Evidence from Better Work." 2013.

<sup>187</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2014.



spending.<sup>188</sup> Understanding and satisfying an increasingly diverse customer base is critical to growing market share and the bottom line.

The consumer products industry has played a critical role in unlocking economic opportunities for women in retail, manufacturing, and agriculture production, yet women continue to hold some of the lowest-paying and vulnerable jobs in the industry. As consumers, women report a lack of products and services that meet their needs as well as marketing and communication that patronizes rather than inspires confidence.

There is considerable momentum to advance women's empowerment among consumer products companies. Many companies have well-established programs on diversity and supply chain management that seek to advance women's rights, well-being, and opportunities. Companies are also increasingly seeking ways to more intentionally incorporate women's economic empowerment into other aspects including responsible marketing and advertising, product design, and emerging-market growth strategies. Consumer products companies are uniquely placed to leverage and combine a range of assets to advance women's economic empowerment.

### **ACCESS TO SAFE AND EQUITABLE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Women are well-represented in the workforce of consumer products companies and along their value chains. Women make up more than 50 percent of employees for many consumer products companies, yet they make up a much smaller share of leadership positions. Only two of the female CEOs of S&P 500 companies are from consumer products companies.<sup>189</sup>

Despite serving as a gateway to the formal economy for many women, some observers argue that gender inequality has been viewed as a competitive advantage to companies in certain consumer product industries, in particular garment manufacturing.<sup>190</sup> Around 80 percent of Vietnam's 700,000 light manufacturing workers are women. Yet these women tend to be in lower-paid positions as sewers and helpers, while men are usually in higher-paid occupations such as cutters and mechanics. Men are three times more likely than women to be supervisors, and women tend to work longer hours than men and are less likely to be promoted or receive training.<sup>191</sup> Although the monthly minimum wage for garment factory workers in Bangladesh was recently increased to 5,300 taka (US\$68)—representing a 77 percent increase—wages are still quite low in that country's garment industry.<sup>192</sup> Health and safety concerns in many light manufacturing settings also affect working conditions for women, in many cases disproportionately.

Wage gaps also exist in sales positions, where female retail workers in the United States earn an average of US\$4 an hour less than their male counterparts. In 2012, this pay gap cost women an estimated US\$40.8 billion in lost wages.<sup>193</sup> While women make up just under half of all retail workers, they make up

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<sup>188</sup> Silverstein and Sayre, 2009.

<sup>189</sup> Catalyst. Women CEOs of the S&P 500. Accessed on December 16, 2015. At the time of this report, this included Carol Meyrowitz, TJX Companies, Inc., and Barbara Rentler, Ross Stores Inc. Other companies on the list such as PepsiCo and Mondelez International also provide consumer goods, but under our definition would be included as food and beverage companies. Catalyst. "Women CEOs of the S&P 500," [www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500](http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/women-ceos-sp-500).

<sup>190</sup> Fontana and Silberman, 2013.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Quadir, 2013.

<sup>193</sup> Traub, 2014.

55 percent of retail's low-wage workers, and about 1.3 million women working in retail are currently living at or near the poverty line.<sup>194</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Investments.** Since 2007, Gap Inc.'s P.A.C.E. program has been providing female factory workers with foundational skills and support that will help them advance in the workplace and in their personal lives, through life-skills education and technical training.<sup>195</sup> More than 30,000 women in 10 countries have participated in the program to date, and the company is committed to educate 1 million women around the world by the end of 2020.<sup>196</sup>

**Purchasing Power.** Shifting procurement practices and engaging directly with suppliers can help improve wages for women in the supply chain. H&M has committed to help all of its strategic suppliers improve pay structures to support a fair living wage by 2018, affecting around 850,000 textile workers.<sup>197</sup>

### **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Women's limited access to productive resources and financial services severely impacts women's ability to own and operate businesses. While women make up more than 40 percent of the agriculture labor force, providing critical raw materials to consumer products companies, many do not have secure land rights and are often barred from inheriting or owning those fields.<sup>198</sup> This affects crop yields and overall productivity as well as their ability to engage more fully in the formal economy.

Two billion adults globally do not use formal financial services to save or borrow money. Ensuring the poor—particularly women—have the proper knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward financial services, and enabling them to participate in the formal financial sector can help them save, build creditworthiness, start businesses, and reduce risks related to illness or loss of employment.<sup>199</sup> The World Bank estimates only about 35 percent of India's adult population had a bank account in 2011, and women were 39 percent less likely than men to have an account at a formal financial institution.<sup>200</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** Launched in 2012 with support from the Walt Disney Foundation, HERfinance is a BSR-led collaborative initiative that seeks to increase financial knowledge and improve access to formal financial services for low-income women and men working in global supply chains. In 2015, with a major investment from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, BSR expanded HERfinance to include wage digitization, with a goal to deepen financial inclusion by enabling workers to receive wages directly into a mobile money account rather than in cash. The program model depends on the engagement of apparel companies and their suppliers, as well as NGO implementation partners who are trained on how to conduct the training, manage relationships with employers, and measure and report impacts. Among the

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Nanda et al., 2013.

<sup>196</sup> Gap Inc., P.A.C.E. program, [www.bewhatspossible.com/pace](http://www.bewhatspossible.com/pace).

<sup>197</sup> H&M. "A fair living wage to garment workers," <http://about.hm.com/en/About/sustainability/commitments/responsible-partners/fair-living-wage.html>.

<sup>198</sup> FAO, The Female Face of Farming, [www.fao.org/gender/infographic/en/](http://www.fao.org/gender/infographic/en/).

<sup>199</sup> BSR HERproject. "What Is HERfinance?," <http://herproject.org/herfinance>.

<sup>200</sup> World Bank, "Who are the Unbanked? Uncovering the Financial Inclusion Gap." 2012.

other partners is Women's World Banking, a global nonprofit that conducts research on the financial needs and behaviors among low-income workers in Indian garment factories.<sup>201</sup>

**Purchasing Power.** As part of Walmart's Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative, the company has committed to source US\$20 billion from women-owned businesses for its U.S. business and double sourcing from women suppliers from other countries where it does business by 2016. Walmart has also partnered with Women's Business Enterprise National Council and WEConnect International to develop a logo to help consumers easily recognize products from women-owned businesses. Purchasing an item that is Women-Owned Certified means customers are supporting a business that is at least 51 percent owned by women and also run by a woman.<sup>202</sup>

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A lack of education and skills remains a critical factor hindering women's professional development and advancing their well-being. Although the gender gap in educational attainment is improving in many countries, employees and supply chain workers are increasingly interested in both informal and formal mentorship and training opportunities. This includes technical skills and job-relevant training as well as increased knowledge and awareness of rights and issues affecting their well-being.<sup>203</sup> This is particularly important for women in the consumer products supply chain, the majority of whom are young and have limited education.

### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** ANN INC. is investing US\$1.3 million to train and empower the next generation of female leaders in the United States over four years as part of the ANNpower Vital Voices Initiative.<sup>204</sup> The initiative selects female high school students to be ANNpower fellows, receiving mentorship by influential women in the media, business, and entertainment fields as well as leadership training. After the program, fellows are eligible for grants to implement projects in their communities.<sup>205</sup>

## SOCIAL PROTECTION AND CHILDCARE

Inflexible work schedules and lack of basic benefits such as maternity leave keep many women from advancing economically whether they are factory workers, small business owners, or corporate executives. Many female supply chain workers report difficulties accessing basic health products and services and face challenges in finding suitable childcare options. Although some countries, including India, require manufacturing sites with a certain number of female workers of reproductive age to provide an on-site childcare facility, many factories often do not dedicate appropriate resources, leaving working parents with unattractive childcare options.<sup>206</sup> Retail workers with erratic work schedules, including shift or part-time work, find it difficult to attend to household duties such as childcare and also achieve their potential at work.

<sup>201</sup> BSR HERproject. "What Is HERfinance?," <http://herproject.org/herfinance>.

<sup>202</sup> Walmart. "Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative Goals," <http://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/womens-economic-empowerment/our-goals>.

<sup>203</sup> Better Work. "Focus on Women," [http://betterwork.org/global/?page\\_id=3550](http://betterwork.org/global/?page_id=3550).

<sup>204</sup> Ann Inc. "Caring About Women: AnnPower Vital Voices Initiative," [www.responsiblyann.com/empoweringWomenGirls.asp](http://www.responsiblyann.com/empoweringWomenGirls.asp).

<sup>205</sup> Ann Inc. "The ANNpower Vital Voices Initiative: Training and Empowering the Next Generation of Leaders," <http://annpower.vitalvoices.org/about/annpower-vital-voices-initiative>.

<sup>206</sup> Timberland. "Timberland Responsibility," <http://responsibility.timberland.com/factories/?story=1>.

### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** Engaging with local NGOs can help develop locally tailored solutions to address gaps in the use of childcare facilities for factory workers. Timberland worked with Celebrity Fashions Ltd., one of its suppliers in Chennai, India, as well as NGOs ASK India and Samvada to open a community-based early childhood care and education (ECCE) center to provide high-quality childcare. The Center is available to factory employees as well as parents within the community, with care offered to workers' children at subsidized rates. The factory hired professionally trained ECCE staff with the help of Samvada, who ensured childcare, preschool education, and after-school care would meet the legal requirements as well as community and factory workers' needs. Samvada also helped form a Mothers' Committee Group to involve factory workers to supervise and monitor the ECCE center.<sup>207</sup>

### **ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND FAMILY FORMATION**

While consumer products companies tend to have competitive maternity-leave benefits and policies for employees, workers in part-time positions and in the supply chain continue to face challenges to their reproductive rights and maternity benefits. Many female factory workers are between the ages of 18 and 25 and often work in environments that lack access to information about reproductive health and nutrition, as well as critical health services. Research has shown that this contributes to high rates of anemia, inadequate pre- and post-natal care, and exposure to infections and illness, including sexually transmitted and other preventable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B and C.<sup>208</sup> Reports have also identified violations of pregnant women's rights, including discrimination in hiring, promotion, and dismissal as well as failure to make reasonable workplace accommodations to address the needs of pregnant workers.<sup>209</sup> Although laws and policies are often in place to protect these workers, enforcement mechanisms often fall short.

The consumer products industry also affects women's reproductive health through their products and services. Pregnant women and new mothers may be more susceptible to illness and more severely affected by infection.<sup>210</sup> Better nutrition and eliminating exposure to toxins and dangerous chemicals are important for a woman's health as well as a baby's growth and development. Many women lack awareness and education about what to eat and what to avoid. At the same time, lack of transparency about the ingredients of many household products makes it difficult for women to make informed decisions.

### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Brands and Products.** Disclosing ingredients in household products helps women assess the risks to their health and that of their children. SC Johnson was the first major company to disclose fragrance ingredients down to .09 percent for air care products like Glade. For all other products, the company plans to disclose fragrance above .09 percent or the top 10 fragrance ingredients used. The program started in the United States and Canada and is expected to expand to other regions soon.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> BSR, 2006.

<sup>209</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2015.

<sup>210</sup> Jamieson, Theiler, and Rasmussen, 2006.

<sup>211</sup> SC Johnson. "What's Inside SC Johnson," [www.whatsinsidescjohnson.com/us/en/fragrances-you-can-trust](http://www.whatsinsidescjohnson.com/us/en/fragrances-you-can-trust).



**People.** Maternity policies that include paid time-off as well as acknowledge the need to create supportive work environments for breastfeeding mothers can help women achieve their professional goals and support healthy development of their children. Nestlé's Maternity Protection Policy seeks to strengthen maternal safeguards and help all employees care for their children. The policy promotes five pillars: maternity protection, employment protection and non-discrimination, healthy work environment, flexible work arrangements, and a work environment conducive to breastfeeding. The policy requires a minimum of 14 weeks paid maternity leave to all of Nestlé's female employees. It also reinforces the company's full support for the WHO recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life.<sup>212</sup>

## FREEDOM FROM THE RISK OF VIOLENCE

Sexual harassment of workers in the supply chain remains an issue in the industry. Power differences, misaligned pay incentives, and the high-pressure nature of garment work have all been identified as contributing factors. Women are most often, but not exclusively, the targets of sexual harassment. The damaging effects of sexual harassment can extend from victims to factory productivity and have broader implications for families and communities.<sup>213</sup> Sexual harassment is not exclusively the domain of developing countries. Studies have found that 40 to 50 percent of women in the European Union have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. As an industry with a significant proportion of women, it is important that proper policies, reporting, and remediation mechanisms are in place.<sup>214</sup>

Through responsible advertising, marketing, education, and product design, companies can help change gender norms and stereotypes that reinforce certain attitudes and behaviors. Unfortunately, marketing and advertising that disregards gender sensitivities remain all too common in the industry.

### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Advocacy.** Avon and the Avon Foundation have committed to lead and fund global and local programs to educate people and support laws to end violence against women. The company uses a range of communication tools and platforms to raise awareness.<sup>215</sup> This includes the Communications X-Change, a digital global communications website dedicated to ending violence against women, and #SeeTheSigns of Domestic Violence, a global social media campaign to raise awareness of domestic abuse.<sup>216</sup>

**Partnerships.** In 2014, Instituto Avon partnered with Fundo ELAS, a Brazilian women's fund, to create a new fund in Brazil called Speak Out Loud Without Fear. ELAS ran a competitive process to award grants to projects designed by grassroots women's organizations that used innovative approaches to address the issue of domestic violence. Through the collaboration, Avon was able to support locally driven solutions for greater and more sustainable impact. The partnership's scale enabled ELAS to deliver innovative capacity-building activities for grantee organizations, including trainings on using new technologies, and workshops on more effective storytelling.<sup>217</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Nestlé, Maternity Protection Policy, 2015. [www.nestle.com/asset-library/documents/library/documents/people/nestle-policy-maternity-protection.pdf](http://www.nestle.com/asset-library/documents/library/documents/people/nestle-policy-maternity-protection.pdf).

<sup>213</sup> Truskinovsky, Rubin, and Brown, 2014.

<sup>214</sup> Numhauser-Henning and Laulom, 2011.

<sup>215</sup> AVON. "Avon speak out against domestic violence," [www.avoncompany.com/corporate-responsibility/philanthropy/speak-out-against-domestic-violence/](http://www.avoncompany.com/corporate-responsibility/philanthropy/speak-out-against-domestic-violence/).

<sup>216</sup> AVON. "#SeeTheSigns," [www.avonfoundation.org/causes/domestic-violence/seethesigns/](http://www.avonfoundation.org/causes/domestic-violence/seethesigns/).

<sup>217</sup> AVON. "Global Efforts to End Violence Against Women," [www.avoncompany.com/corporate-responsibility/philanthropy/speak-out-against-domestic-violence/impact/global-vaw-efforts/](http://www.avoncompany.com/corporate-responsibility/philanthropy/speak-out-against-domestic-violence/impact/global-vaw-efforts/).

## VOICE IN SOCIETY AND POLICY INFLUENCE

Many women lack voice and agency to be able to advocate for systemic changes. Inside companies, women's limited representation in leadership roles can make it difficult to find champions to speak up for issues that matter to women. In the supply chain, female factory workers and agricultural producers lack access to independent workers' organizations and/or cooperatives that can represent their interests in the workplace.<sup>218</sup>

Through their brands and products, companies can shape public opinion on key women's issues. They can provide a platform and channel for women to share their stories, encourage policy changes, and inspire others to act. It is essential to ensure women's voices are heard in the design and development of products if companies are to ensure products meet their needs. A study by the Boston Consulting Group found that many women across markets "experience simple, chronic frustration with particular products and services which seem to have been created and marketed by companies that have little to no understanding of who women today are and what they want."<sup>219</sup>

How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Brands and Products.** Unilever's Dove brand created the Dove Self-Esteem project more than 10 years ago to challenge beauty stereotypes and help women view beauty as a source of confidence, not anxiety. Since 2004, Dove has engaged women in a discussion about beauty, employed communications vehicles such as school workshops to challenge beauty stereotypes, and created self-esteem-building educational programs and activities that encourage, inspire, and motivate girls around the world. The results of the program have shown that improving girls' confidence reduces the likelihood of them becoming disengaged from social activities.<sup>220</sup>

**People.** People. Employee resource groups have become an essential way for peers to share challenges and provide a collective voice on issues that matter to them. Some companies have also established internal advisory boards where different groups can come together to identify new opportunities to advance diversity and inclusion. In 2009, Sodexo CEO, Michel Landel, launched Women's International Forum for Talent (SWIFt) which is an advisory board comprised of 35 senior managers from 17 different nationalities and all areas of the organization. Its objectives are to improve gender balance and the advancement of women at every level of the organization. The advisory board reports to the CEO and has helped the company increase its representation of women in upper management from 17 percent in 2009 to 23 percent in 2014.<sup>221</sup>

## FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Women face restrictions to their mobility in many countries where consumer products companies operate. For female consumers, safety is a serious concern, especially in the urban centers where most consumer activity takes place. For example, research by ICRW and the UN Foundation as part of the Safe Cities Delhi Programme found that 95 percent of women and girls feel vulnerable to sexual harassment in public

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<sup>218</sup> Majurin, 2012.

<sup>219</sup> Silverstein and Sayre, "Women Want More A Revolutionary Opportunity," *BCG Perspectives*, 2009.

<sup>220</sup> Unilever, "Dove surpasses self-esteem education target one year ahead of schedule," [www.unilever.com/brands/brand-stories/Dove-surpasses-self-esteem-education-target-one-year-ahead-of-schedule.html](http://www.unilever.com/brands/brand-stories/Dove-surpasses-self-esteem-education-target-one-year-ahead-of-schedule.html).

<sup>221</sup> Sodexo, The Optimal Gender Balance, <http://www.sodexo.com/en/corporate-responsibility/diversity-inclusion/priorities/women.aspx>.

spaces in the city of Delhi. Sixty-three percent of women surveyed were afraid to go out alone after dark and 21 percent did not go out after dark at all.<sup>222</sup>

Forced labor and human trafficking also affect millions of women in global supply chains: The ILO estimates that more than 20 million people around the world are forced to work against their will. An example of this is the Sumangali scheme in India, which brings young women to work in fabric mills and apparel factories on the promise of decent wages, accommodations, and payment of a lump-sum amount at the end of a three-year contract. In some cases, this lump-sum payment is used as a dowry for marriage. The problem exists primarily in fabric mills, which reports show pay below minimum wage, provide unacceptable living conditions, and force women to work overtime.<sup>223</sup>

#### How can companies leverage their assets for progress?

**Partnerships.** Addressing complex, systemic issues like the Sumangali scheme in India requires partnerships and an industry-wide approach. Gap Inc. has led the establishment of an industry working group through the Ethical Trading Initiative that brings together international companies and retailers, the local and national government, manufacturers and mills, NGOs, and trade unions to discuss the issue and identify a locally driven way forward. This group engaged with the Tirupur Exporters Association to develop guidelines for factories to help eliminate unacceptable employment practices. These guidelines have been adopted by representatives from local NGOs, industry representatives, and trade unions.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Nandita Bhatla, Pranita Achyut, Sancheeta Ghosh, Abhishek Gautam, and Ravi Verma, Safe Cities Free From Violence Against Women and Girls: Baseline Finding from the "Safe Cities Delhi Programme," 2013.

<sup>223</sup> Gap Inc. "Social & Environmental Responsibility Report 2011|2012: Forced labor," [www.gapinc.com/content/csr/html/human-rights/forced-labor.html](http://www.gapinc.com/content/csr/html/human-rights/forced-labor.html).

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

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## About BSR

BSR is a global nonprofit organization that works with its network of more than 250 member companies to build a just and sustainable world. From its offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR develops sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. Visit [www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org) for more information about BSR's more than 20 years of leadership in sustainability.

## About ICRW

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is a global research institute with headquarters in Washington, D.C., and regional offices in Nairobi, Kenya, and New Delhi, India. Our research evidence identifies women's contributions as well as the obstacles that prevent them from being economically strong and able to fully participate in society. ICRW translates these insights into a path of action that honors women's human rights, ensures gender equality and creates the conditions in which all women can thrive.