

The Coalition for Women's Economic Empowerment and Equality is an advocacy coalition that seeks to advance the following principles of women's economic empowerment and gender-transformative policy-making. The principles are presented as a list but do not imply a ranking of any principle over another.

1. Leave no woman behind

Improving women's participation and productivity in the economy improves the well-being and sustained development of their communities and nations. Resources, tools, policies, programs, services and leadership initiatives aimed at improving economic performance and outcomes should be inclusive of all women, including older women; youth; LBT women; women with disabilities; indigenous women; racial, ethnic and religious minorities; poor, rural, displaced and refugee women or otherwise marginalized women and girls. This requires accounting for and addressing the legal, socio-cultural and political barriers that keep many women and girls from participating fully in their economies and societies and engaging them in creating change.

2. Understand and cultivate an enabling environment for the fulfillment of women's rights, including and beyond economic rights

Economic empowerment includes not only women's equal access and opportunity to labor markets, labor force participation, corporate leadership, business-ownership and entrepreneurship within local, regional and international economies, but also depends on a number of women's rights that are essential to women's ability to thrive as economic actors across the lifecycle. This includes but is not limited to access to decent work opportunities; having lives free of violence and exploitation; achieving the highest possible standard of health and wellbeing, including access to the full range of health services; enjoying full political, legal and human rights such as access to registration/identification/citizenship documents; access to formal and non-formal education; equal protection of and access to land and property rights and the enjoyment of all fundamental labor rights, particularly the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining. Furthermore, women's individual empowerment is constrained by institutions and restrictive social norms that drive behavior and attitudes toward women's access, agency and leadership, or increase their time poverty and the burden of unpaid care work. These systems set the barriers and opportunities that influence WEE and should be understood and addressed as such.

3. Work to transform social norms and structural barriers that constrain women's economic empowerment, including working with men and boys

Invest in the sensitization of men and boys about harmful gender and social norms that constrain both males and females, reinforcing that women's economic empowerment is not a zero-sum pursuit. Engage men and boys to embrace the idea that respectful and equal treatment of one another and women and girls will bring about more prosperous and peaceful societies. Efforts should recognize that engagement with men and boys and male-dominated institutions is essential to ensure the norm transformation that is necessary to achieve women's economic empowerment. Efforts should also target both male and female religious and cultural leaders, private-sector leaders and government representatives.

4. Address not only assets and resources, but also legal rights, agency and decision-making

It is important for women's economic empowerment efforts to focus on inputs such as financing, market access, strategic networks, business connections, bank accounts and training in business skills and leadership. However, these efforts are insufficient without also addressing women's ability to make financial and economic decisions and act on them, benefiting or profiting from their own efforts. This includes reducing time poverty by reducing the burden of women's unpaid care work, as well as through promoting women's political participation and building and reinforcing their abilities to organize, articulate positions and influence processes and policies that affect them: political empowerment at all levels.

5. Take a life-cycle approach

Achieving women's economic empowerment requires a life-cycle approach that supports women at each stage of life. This begins early with both young and adolescent girls by investing in their quality education, setting them up for success in underrepresented skills like STEM and protecting them from the threats of gender-based violence, drudgery and excessive care burdens and early child-marriage. It continues into adulthood by supporting women's professional skill and leadership development, creating decent work opportunities and an enabling environment for collective action to improve conditions and mitigating the risks to their economic participation. It extends into old age, by protecting the rights and assets of widows, mitigating reduced mobility and enabling older women to adapt to new technologies.

6. Lead with and expand the evidence-base

Economic empowerment efforts should utilize gender analyses to identify systems-focused constraints that block women's economic empowerment. Research, monitoring, evaluation and learning should always be a priority investment. The literature and evidence base should always be consulted before designing programs, and those programs that meet proof-of-concept should be brought to scale.

7. Engage and invest in women's organizations and amplify voices of women and girl leaders

Efforts should identify and work to support existing organizations and leaders, including entrepreneurs and rights activists and women labor organizers, informal and cooperative groups, agricultural workers, rural women leaders and agribusiness leaders working on women's economic empowerment, with the goal of efforts being women-led. Additionally, a number of other women's organizations and informal collectives can have powerful impacts on advancing their individual and collective economic empowerment.

8. Engage where specific interventions will be catalytic or transformative

Pre-program gender and landscape analyses are essential to map ongoing efforts, ensuring that new interventions will build upon rather than duplicate existing work (e.g., another mentoring or training program that women have already received). These analyses will also ensure that initiatives break existing cycles of persistent discrimination and inequality.

9. Walk the Talk

Women's economic empowerment must be reflected in policy frameworks, program investments, private sector business models and public- and private-sector leadership commitment. It requires a comprehensive approach that is embedded into multiple functions within an institution and remains a joint responsibility shared by all.

10. Do no harm

A core principle of humanitarianism is to do no harm; this should be held paramount before and during any efforts to promote women's economic empowerment, recognizing that empowering women disrupts the status quo and threatens powerful actors and can create risks that must be anticipated and requires that steps be taken to mitigate those risks and ensure appropriate mitigation techniques are employed. Specifically, policies and programs should recognize and take steps to mitigate any increase to girls' and women's risks, such as gender-based violence, increased time burden, environmental degradation, disruption of supply chains, etc..

