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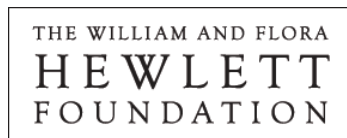
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# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: A REVIEW OF EVIDENCE ON ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

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## Women's Economic Empowerment: A Review of Evidence on Enablers and Barriers

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Date: 23 SEPTEMBER 2016

This paper is one of a series undertaken by the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women GrOW to inform its engagement with and provide evidence to the UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.

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# Executive Summary

This rapid evidence review summarizes the evidence that women’s economic empowerment (WEE) promotes economic growth, firm productivity, and human development. It also reviews the key enablers and barriers to WEE. We have followed strict criteria regarding the rigor of studies included in this review, noting inconsistencies in the scale and quality of evidence on key questions about WEE. We draw on this evidence to distill key findings to support the United Nations High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment’s priority setting and make recommendations for policy interventions or important topics requiring further research.

## The Case for Increasing WEE

**Economic case:** Numerous studies have found that gender gaps in labor force participation and employment, entrepreneurship (women-owned business or self-employment), and agricultural resources restrict overall economic growth. Several studies also find that gender gaps in education negatively affect economic growth.

**Business case:** A number of case studies—but only limited econometric data—provide evidence that including and supporting female workers through reduced gender discrimination and family-friendly policies increases productivity at the firm level. Theory suggests that these policies allow firms to attract and hire more talented employees, improve retention rates, decrease employee stress and absenteeism, and allow more flexible operating hours, all of which can reduce cost/increase productivity. The evidence for this is weak, however, because it is difficult to separate correlation from causation. There are ongoing efforts to make and then certify firms as gender equitable, and these efforts should be accompanied by rigorous evaluation of long-term outcomes.

**Development case:** Evidence demonstrates that WEE is beneficial for the well-being of children, communities, and the overall development of countries, owing to a wider distribution of the fruits of growth. The World Bank (2012) elaborates on the claims that WEE improves family outcomes in terms of children’s education, reduced child mortality, more inclusive decisionmaking within the household, and the ability and power to influence decisions within society.

# Enablers of and Barriers to WEE

Development policy and programming can increase the enablers of and reduce barriers to WEE. It is important to distinguish between broad-based policies not specifically targeted towards women but which can impact WEE and gender-specific policies.

## Enablers of WEE

- Broad-based policies
  - » **Promote economic growth:** Expanding the overall size of the economy is essential to improving the position of women. Research shows that growth increases demand for labor, incentivizing employers to hire female workers—especially if employment among men is already high (Doepke and Tertilt 2009). In countries experiencing rapid economic growth, increasing demand for labor and availability of better paying jobs ensures that WEE does not become a zero-sum game between men and women. In these countries, greater female inclusion in the labor market is less likely to adversely affect male counterparts.
  - » **Increase public services and infrastructure:** A substantial body of literature shows that improvements in infrastructure and public services can positively affect WEE because they reduce the amount of time women spend taking care of basic household functions, freeing up time for participation in the labor market. For example, electrification, which has many positive effects on people’s lives, can reduce unpaid work by enabling the use of labor-saving devices such as electric stoves and has been shown to increase labor force participation among women (Dinkelman 2011). Greater piped water access can also play a key role in reducing the burden of unpaid work for women (Devoto et al. 2012) given that women are still largely responsible for collecting safe drinking water, which can be a very onerous task.
  - » **Provide women-friendly public transportation:** A few studies are beginning to investigate the effect of urban public transportation on outcomes for women (Sur 2014). This literature finds that access to speedy and reliable transportation is highly desirable for everyone, especially if designed in gender-sensitive ways (Riverson et al. 2005). This may also reduce safety concerns that discourage women from entering the labor force or limit them to working at home.

- » **Promote the diffusion of technology:** The ability of information and communications technology to empower women through greater access to education, political involvement, and greater market access is widely documented, but its effectiveness depends on the social and economic characteristics of women and their households (Masika and Bailur 2015).
- Gender-specific policies
  - » **Provide child care:** The provision of dependent care, especially high-quality child care, is one of the most important enablers of women’s economic empowerment. Women around the world report that care responsibilities keep them from joining the labor force and being more productive workers, and evidence shows that the availability of low-cost child care promotes labor force participation among women (Angeles et al. 2014). It is not clear, however, that child care reduces the total time burden for women, and some evidence shows that women who work outside the home do more total work than women who do not (Samman et al. 2016). In addition to giving women more freedom to work and more peace of mind at work, expansion of child care services typically increases the number of jobs available to women, although these jobs do not pay well and may reinforce the gender segregation of the workforce.
  - » **Change laws:** Studies show that the reform of inheritance and family law to lift prohibitions on daughters’ legacies and to reduce husbands’ power over their wives’ economic activity have positive effects, some of which go beyond the specific outcomes reforms intend to address. In both India (Deininger, Goyal, and Nagarajan 2010) and Ethiopia (Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo 2015), legal changes in favor of gender equity led to a rise in the average age at marriage, an outcome not specifically targeted by the legislation. In Rwanda, reform to the land tenure system to ensure women without marriage certificates do not lose their rights over land has also led to positive outcomes for unmarried women.

## Barriers to WEE

- **The size of the informal sector and the overrepresentation of women in that sector:** A major barrier to women moving into more productive sectors of the economy is their concentration in the informal sector. Policies designed to move workers to the formal sector can have a disproportionately positive effect on women. Working in the formal economy is more likely to result in WEE because it is more closely associated with control over one’s own income than

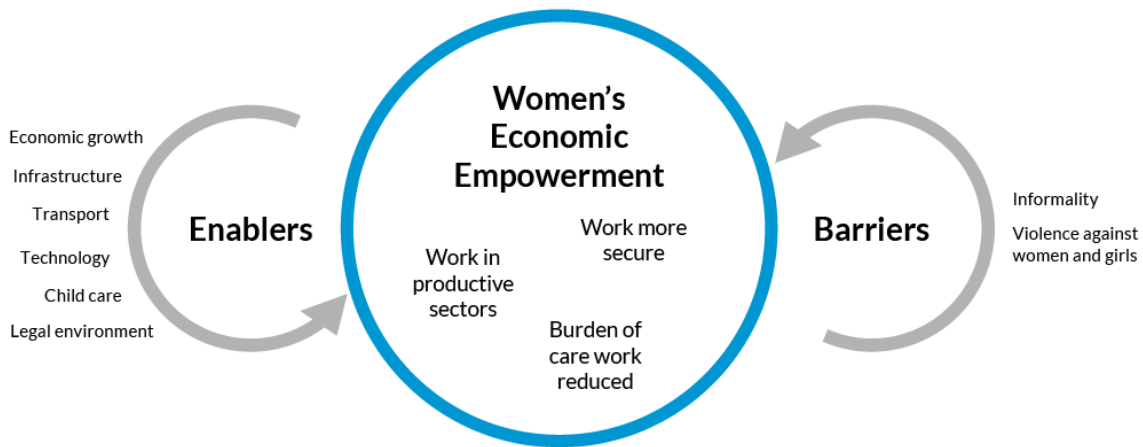


informal work. For example, the International Labour Organization promotes greater regulation of domestic and home-based work, which are dominated by women. Some studies have shown that strengthening the collective bargaining capacity of female workers in this sector and improving awareness of their rights can improve both working conditions, which can be very precarious, and income levels (Chen 2001).

- Violence against women and girls:** The role that violence against women and girls plays in preventing WEE has been underinvestigated, and there is a limited evidence base on how to prevent violence against women in the workplace. Research has instead focused on the negative effects of intimate partner violence and sexual violence. Evidence suggests that intimate partner violence causes worker absenteeism (Raghavendra et al. 2013), which results in economic losses (Lorenc et al. 2013). Separate research demonstrates that sexual violence against women has direct negative effects on their labor force participation, which results in reduction of wages. Thus, violence against women directly impacts productivity at the micro and macrolevels of individuals and entire economies. Evidence appears mixed, however, on whether increasing female income from work or through targeted cash transfers reduces their vulnerability to intimate partner violence.

FIGURE ES.1

**Visualization of the Conceptual Framework**



# Introduction

Empowerment has been defined broadly as “gaining power and control over decisions and resources that determine the quality of one’s life” (Narayan 2002, 10). Empowerment means increasing opportunities and choice in several ways across social, legal, and economic domains. In this review, we focus on women’s economic empowerment (WEE) as expanding women’s economic opportunities in terms of both labor market access and productivity.<sup>1</sup> However, because of the traditional role of women as family caretakers and providers of household work, we also explore barriers that impact their participation in labor markets. These include laws and regulations, social norms about gender roles, public infrastructure provision, and economic policy factors impacting productivity. We do not attempt to exhaustively review the entire literature; rather, we focus on a subset of topics deemed most relevant to the engagement of the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) with the United Nation’s High-Level Panel (HLP).

This review focuses on three salient features of WEE: (1) reducing incidence of unpaid work, (2) moving from precarious to secure work, and (3) promoting greater inclusion in high-productivity sectors. We situate this review within the context of recent developments and persisting gaps in WEE, including in the context of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.

## The State of Women’s Economic Empowerment: Recent Achievements and Remaining Gaps

In recent years, we have witnessed significant worldwide progress toward gender equality across several key indicators in the economic, social, political, and legal realms. But the type and extent of progress has varied significantly within social segments of individual countries and across major regions of the world. Often explained by societal path dependencies and specific policy interventions, these variations offer learning opportunities to better understand what works and under what circumstances.

According to the latest World Bank (2016a) statistics comparing data from 2000 and 2013, women worldwide have made strides, in both absolute and relative terms, in educational outcomes at all levels. The net primary enrollment rate for girls has improved from 81 to 88 percent, secondary enrollment

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<sup>1</sup> This review focuses on women’s economic empowerment. The reader should note that we also use terms such as gender equity, gender equality, and greater female inclusion.

from 50 to 65 percent, and youth literacy rate from 84 to 89 percent. By each of these measures, women have made more progress than men, thereby reducing the gender gap. During the same period, women's life expectancy at birth improved from 70 to 73 years, remaining 4 years higher than men. Other health indicators affecting women have also experienced significant improvements: the percentage of pregnant women receiving prenatal care has improved from 86 to 95 percent and the maternal mortality rate has fallen from 130 to 75 deaths per 100,000 live births. Regarding politics and women's agency, the percentage of women holding seats of parliament around the world increased from 13 to 22 percent between 1990 and 2014. Laws against intimate partner violence (IPV) have become commonplace throughout the world; 127 countries have such laws as of 2015 compared to just 1 country in 1976.

However, these purposely selected positive global indicators present only a partial picture. Indicators of female labor force participation (LFP) have stagnated since 1990, dropping slightly from 52 to 50 percent overall and from 44 to 39 percent among 15- to 24-year olds. Overall, men remain 17 percent more likely to participate in the labor force than women. Further, women are twice as likely to work part-time and to continue facing gender-segregated labor markets where men dominate in sectors such as manufacturing and transportation. They are also less likely to be educated and employed in high value-added fields such as technology or research, resulting in worldwide gender pay gaps of 10–30 percent. The interpretation of these statistics is nuanced, and what appear to be gaps could in fact produce long-term benefits for women. For instance, lower LFP among 15- to 24-year-olds could be an effect of the widely documented improvements in levels of education. Similarly, increased opportunities for part-time work could improve women's ability to maintain healthy work-life balances by allowing them to attend to traditional responsibilities at home.

A large proportion of women's work remains unpaid, including domestic work, contributions to family farms or businesses, and additional responsibilities such as fuel or water gathering. Women are also more likely than men to work in the informal sector, which includes the urban informal economy, a substantial share of the agriculture sector, and undocumented domestic care. Women make up 83 percent of (mostly undocumented) domestic workers worldwide working in unregulated and precarious circumstances. They form 43 percent of labor supply in the agriculture sector worldwide and over 50 percent in East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Women's access and ownership of economic assets presents another major challenge, specifically for women-owned enterprises. In agriculture, for instance, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 2011) estimates that only 20 percent of farmlands around the world are owned by women. Only 10 percent of women-owned enterprises, which make up 30 percent of all firms worldwide, have access to capital (Grewe and Stein

2011). In fact, only 58 percent of women have any type of bank account compared to 65 percent of men (with significant regional differences).

There are still significant and persistent data gaps in collection and dissemination of gender-segregated statistics across several indicators important for documenting progress and ensuring accountability (Buvinic, Furst-Nichols, and Koolwal 2014). The various monitoring and implementation mechanisms accompanying the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could help the availability of these data, particularly at the country level. But existing data clearly identify the areas needing the most improvement, including regional gaps.

## Objectives of this Review

Goal 5 of the SDGs calls upon member states to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” This goal provides an opportunity to reassess the critical role of women in societal transformations. Launched in January 2016 by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment is mandated to recommend actions toward achieving targets identified by SDG Goal 5. The HLP has identified six major themes requiring priority attention: (1) eliminating legal barriers, (2) addressing the care economy, (3) improving pay and conditions, (4) expanding opportunities for informal workers, (5) promoting financial and digital inclusion, and (6) increasing the productivity of women-owned businesses.

As the HLP begins deliberations leading toward recommendations for achieving the ambitious target of the SDGs, this evidence review is designed to inform DFID’s position in advance of the July 2016 HLP meeting and contribute to the drafting of the HLP report. The HLP’s six priority themes all directly relate to enhancing inclusion of women in economic systems, a goal that underlies our focus on labor markets and economic productivity. Our conceptual framing views women as critical economic agents operating within societies where social norms, legal regimes, and political systems determine whether and to what extent they are enabled to realize their economic potential.

To make the best possible recommendations, the HLP and its enablers (including DFID) need access to current evidence on relevant issues. Since there are massive literatures covering major aspects of this topic, we focus on three specific research questions:

1. What are the main factors that impact female inclusion in the workforce, particularly in high-productivity sectors (i.e., supply-side factors)?

2. Is there evidence that greater inclusion leads to improved economic productivity at the firm level (i.e., potential drivers of demand)?
3. What factors determine the ability of women to work more productively?

In this review, the cross-cutting focus on productivity is drives the framing concepts and emphasizes the need for women to realize their economic potential to in turn affect other aspects of their role in society. Our review also supports the hypothesis that economic policymakers around the world should consider policies and spending that promote greater female inclusion as an opportunity to stimulate growth and not a burden on social welfare spending. From a policy perspective, national economies that focus on eliminating the main barriers facing WEE could become more productive in a highly competitive global economic system.

## Research Methodology

To identify relevant literature, we engaged in two types of search. First, we searched two bibliographic databases: Web of Science and EconLit. Our search terms included the following, often entered jointly: women's labor force participation, women's labor supply, child care, time poverty, gender certified firms, workplace health, and workplace violence. We also searched the “grey literature” by using the same search terms on the websites of the World Bank, UN Women, International Labour Organization, Overseas Development Institute, and the McKinsey Global Institute. We then followed references we encountered while reading items found by our search and examined articles that cited specific, path-breaking articles. We assembled approximately 400 articles and reports. Our selection criteria for the approximately 100 references that we reviewed required research to have been published during or after 1995 (or widely cited), be relevant to our themes, and published in English or Spanish.

## Framing Concepts

There are a few framing concepts that guided us as we chose, summarized, and integrated the literature we read for this review.

We use the labor economics concept of *labor supply*, which highlights the role of household production and market wages in women's decisions to work in the labor market. Household production is the unpaid work required to keep households functioning, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and ensuring that there is fuel and water, as well as the work involved in care for dependents—children, the

elderly, and people with illness or disabilities. There is great inequity in household production, with women doing most of the household production around the world. This inequity is concerning in and of itself, as household production is often unrecognized and almost always undervalued despite being essential to the functioning of economies. The inequity in household production constrains women's ability to work in the labor force while facilitating men's ability to work, thereby creating a heavily gendered labor supply. In addition, it may create "time poverty" for women, which can interfere with mental and physical health. Women may find work that is easier to combine with household production, such as self-employment, to be more attractive than joining the labor force.

Two other factors that influence labor supply are the **wages** women are paid in the market and **household income**. When wages increase, LFP is expected to increase. Thus, the female wage rate is one possible lever for increasing the labor market engagement of women. In contrast, theory suggests that when household income increases (holding market opportunities constant), women's labor market participation may decrease. Empirical evidence from several countries shows that when economic growth increases men's income without opening up new opportunities for women, female participation in the labor market actually declines because they can afford not to work (Chatterjee, Desai, and Vanneman 2014).

Another concept from labor economics is **labor demand**, which determines the wages that firms are willing to pay. Firms are willing to pay more when there is a higher demand for their product (domestically or internationally) and when worker productivity is higher (e.g., because of greater education and training and/or technological advances that are complementary to labor). Firms' willingness to hire women, especially into certain occupations, may be affected by social norms, but some theories suggest that when demand for labor increases and women are as productive as men, any bias against hiring women may eventually be offset by bottom line considerations (Becker 1957). In our review, we focus on both macroeconomic factors such as economic growth or trade liberalization, which can affect the demand for workers in general, and microeconomic factors such as firm management practices, including hiring, worker training and promotion, and the provision of family-friendly practices and benefits.

Another guiding principle for our review is the centrality of **social norms** to the subject of WEE. A norm is a prescription or proscription of behavior that applies to a particular group and can be informal or formal (i.e., encoded into religious or civil law). Norms are typically accompanied by sanctions for violations that can range from peer disapproval to prison sentences. Social norms underlie women's greater responsibility for household production and restrictions on women's mobility, both of which affect women's economic choices. Social norms also affect WEE more subtly in the form of stereotypes

(often internalized) about appropriate jobs for women that underlie the ubiquitous gender segregation of occupations.

Some norms formalize gender inequity, such as laws that restrict the amount of time women can work or that require a father or husband's permission before a woman can work. Others formalize gender equity, such as laws that mandate gender equity in pay, mandate equal inheritance rights for daughters, or criminalize sexual harassment in the workplace. Gender-restrictive laws place constraints on women's economic choices, but laws that encode gender equity provide tools individual women and their political advocates can use for economic empowerment.

**Violence** against women and girls is a tool used to exert power over women that is, in some places, accepted as permissible, even by women. Exposure to the risk of violence is a cost that many women must consider when making decisions about contraception, household production, and whether to participate in the labor force and where. It is also a major threat to women's lives and health. Ensuring that women are safe commuting to work and in the workplace is an essential factor in promoting WEE. The literature on violence against women and girls is vast, and we limit our attention to discussions of violence that involve women's disproportionate share of household production or that affect their choices about work.

**Policy changes**, gender specific or broad, can have a disproportionate effect (positive or negative) on women and are therefore important levers to promote WEE. We will emphasize both types of policy levers in this review for two reasons. First, policies that are targeted more broadly sometimes have a bigger effect on women than gender-specific policies. For example, electrification and other infrastructure improvements may be the single best way to reduce women's burden from household production activities. Second, these broader policies are sometimes more politically possible because they often have positive effects on many aspects of life and are widely popular.

As we chose and summarized the literature on WEE, we kept in mind the centrality of regional and national **differences** in *political circumstances* and the unique unfolding of **economic development** in place. The nature of governments and the political process can create different opportunities and constraints for promoting and actualizing WEE nationally and even subnationally. Countries differ, for example, in the influence of ethnicity or of religious institutions on the political process. In addition, economic development is proceeding differently from region to region and affects women's LFP differently.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A strand of literature has tested the existence of a U-shaped relationship between the level of economic development and female labor supply across countries (Goldin 1995, 61–90). Women's labor force participation starts at a high level when countries are at a lower level of development and where agriculture dominates the economy. At medium levels of development, the dominance of the income effect (the decrease in women's work

Policies that promote WEE will need to differ according to the size of the agricultural, manufacturing, and service sectors of the local economy. They may also differ depending on the level of urbanization.

Finally, no individual is simply and only a woman. It is essential, as policies are formulated, to remember that many women face factors that facilitate and constrain their choices because of characteristics other than their gender. Women who are younger or older, women who are members of stigmatized groups, migrant women, women who are very poor or women with disabilities often suffer from “double jeopardy”<sup>3</sup> as they try to make choices that benefit themselves and their loved ones. For these women, the principal constraints may not derive from gender, as they may identify more with aspects of their identity other than their gender. This will affect not only the degree to which policies designed to promote the economic empowerment of women succeed or fail, but also the political priority that people—including women—place on policies designed to increase WEE.

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due to an increase in men’s income) relative to a weak own-substitution effect (the change in women’s work relative to the change in their own wage) explains the downward portion. The upward part of the curve represents modernized countries where increased education levels allow women to participate in prestigious occupations and increase women’s market wages. The latest evidence shows no consistent U-shaped relationship for developing countries but rather an increasing trend [An increasing trend toward what??] due to sectoral changes (Gaddis and Klasen 2014; Tam 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Can be triple or more and referred to as *intersectionality*.



# What Constitutes Women's Economic Empowerment for this Review?

There is a wide-ranging discussion of what constitutes women's empowerment and how to measure it, but the literature refers broadly to "women's ability to make decisions and affect outcomes of importance to themselves and their families" (Malhotra, Schuler, Boender 2002, 10). One aspect unique to the discussion of women's empowerment, compared with a more general discussion of empowerment, is that women do not only experience a lack of power in state and civil society institutions. As Malhotra, Schuler, Boender (2002) say, "interpersonal gender dynamics within the household are considered part of the equation of social exclusion." Thus, any discussion of WEE must acknowledge the need for women to have choices with respect to family life as well as public life. In this report, we focus on expanding women's economic opportunities and choices about working in the labor market, and we specifically include a discussion of the literature on the gendered nature of household responsibilities that have traditionally constrained those labor market choices and opportunities.

In this section, we identify and describe three aspects of WEE that we focus on in this report: (1) reducing unpaid work (burden of care), (2) moving from precarious to secure work (often identified with the move from the informal to the formal sector), and (3) moving into high-productivity and high-growth sectors of the economy. We use these three outcomes to focus our discussion of barriers and enablers to WEE and to limit the literature we review to factors that, theoretically or empirically, affect these three outcomes.

## Reducing Unpaid Work

Women do a disproportionate share of care work and household production in virtually every country (Samman et al. 2016). This problem is particularly acute in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) because the absence of labor saving devices (that require electricity) and piped water makes household production in those settings more time consuming. The vast majority of this work is unpaid and is not taken into account when the GDP of a country is calculated, making this contribution to the well-being of the population invisible and undervalued (Antonopoulos 2008). In addition, although women who

work for pay do less care work and household production, the difference in unpaid work between women who work for pay and those who do not is not commensurate (Rost, Bates, and Dellepiane 2015). Therefore, women who work for pay end up doing more overall work than men or women who do not work for pay.

Time poverty is a term used to capture the experience of people who experience a paucity of either leisure, sleep, or both. To avoid the inclusion of people, often quite affluent, who work very long hours by choice, Bardasi and Wodon (2010, 51) define time-poor individuals as those “...who work long hours and belong to households that are poor or would become poor if the individuals were to reduce their working hours up to the time-poverty line.” An analysis of time-use data (Arora et al. 2015) from a household survey of Mozambique created a time poverty headcount index and shows that 50 percent of women are time poor compared to just 8 percent of men. In fact, women’s time is much more constrained than men worldwide (Blackden and Wodon 2006). In many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, women’s time poverty has been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which increases their caretaking responsibilities and reduces the ability of other family members to take on some of the work (Kes and Swaminathan 2006).

The consequences of caretaking are also important for adolescent girls. Kes and Swaminathan (2006) find that older girls also do more unpaid work than their brothers. Other studies suggest that when low-cost child care is available, enrollment of older girls at school is higher (Lokshin, Glinskava, and Garcia 2000).

A reduction in the burden of unpaid work would allow women to work for pay or girls to attend school, if they so desire. It is important to recognize, however, that reducing this burden of unpaid work is important in and of itself, even when women choose not to work in the labor market. In some settings, notably Turkey and India, well-educated women have relatively low rates of LFP (Das et al. 2015; Gunduz-Hosgogor and Smits 2008). This choice reflects both the influence of family income on women’s choices (i.e., well-educated women’s husbands are likely to be earning sufficient wages to keep the family out of poverty) and constraining social norms that proscribe female work outside the home (Ilkcaracan 2012).

## Moving from Precarious to Secure Work

The growth of precarious work is a global problem not confined to LMICs (Kalleberg 2009). One reason work may be precarious is because it takes place in the informal economy. The informal economy

includes self-employed workers (with or without their own employees), contributors to family enterprises, or employees without a formal relationship with their employer (e.g., no employee benefits or protection of labor laws) (ILO 2013). Working in the informal economy is precarious because such work occurs outside whatever system of worker protections exist in that country. Women are more likely than men to work in the informal economy for many reasons (ILO 2013), such as needing to be near home, needing flexible hours to facilitate family responsibilities (Sakho, Lunde, Arribas-Banos 2009), or having a low level of human capital (ILO 2013). Even within the informal sector, women are more likely than men to be in precarious situations. A United Nations report (2005) elucidates how: (1) employers within the informal economy are more likely to be men and (2) the most precarious informal workers, home-based producers often paid by piece, are more likely to be women. Working in the formal economy is more likely to result in WEE because it is more closely associated with control over one's own income than informal work (Kabeer and Natali 2013).

Another reason informal work is characterized as precarious is because it does not pay well, often not even enough to keep an individual or an individual's family out of poverty. Exacerbating the issue, women are paid less than men all around the world (ILO 2016). To some extent, this is because men and women have different characteristics: women often have less education (Pekkarinen 2012) and work in different jobs (World Bank 2011). But there is typically some wage gap above and beyond this. In Peru, the "unexplained" (i.e., not attributable to differences in characteristics) portion of the pay gap is, on average, 28 percent and is larger at the bottom of the wage distribution than at the top (Nopo 2009). In addition, while fatherhood has a positive impact on wages among working men (Killewald 2012), motherhood incurs a wage penalty among working women (Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2016).

Precarious work is also made so by the risk of violence in the workplace. Most research on gender-based violence in low- and middle-income countries concerns IPV (Klugman et al. 2014). There is very little research about gender-based workplace violence, although it has been documented in India (Shrivastava 2015), Peru (Oblitas and Caulfield 2007), Ethiopia (Marsh et al. 2009), and Pakistan (Merkin and Shah 2014). It is notable that the studies in India, Pakistan, and Ethiopia focused on women whose employment was not in other ways precarious (e.g., civil servants and health care workers). This is not to say that gender-based workplace violence is confined to women working in productive sectors; women working in the fishing industry in Malawi routinely engage in transactional sex (MacPherson et al. 2012).

## Moving into More Productive Sectors of the Economy

Women and men do very different work, and, specifically, women are concentrated in industries and occupations that pay less and are less valued (World Bank 2011). Much of the research examining occupational segregation by gender focuses on how much this situation reflects the choices of individuals and how much it reflects institutional and market failures. Salinas and Romani (2014) document the importance of both internalized and external conceptions of what constitutes “women’s work” and “men’s work” in their discussion of the barriers that Chile has encountered in recruiting women into mining. It is clear that social norms about appropriate work are an enormous factor underlying gender segregation in occupations.

Other reasons women and men are concentrated in different occupations include women having access to different networks of information (Contreras et al. 2007), firms discriminating against women either in hiring or in promotion (Abbas, Hameed, and Waheed 2011), and laws and customs that exist to protect workers preventing new workers from gaining ground in an occupation (Razavi et al. 2012). In addition to the concentration of women employees in certain industries and occupations, there are also systematic differences in entrepreneurship between men and women business owners (Coad and Tamvada 2012; Weeks and Seiler 2001; World Bank 2009).

## Summary

These three aspects of WEE—unpaid work, precarious work, and occupational segregation by gender—are intrinsically bound together. Women’s burden of care prevents them from seeking out male-dominated occupations because these occupations are less flexible and less amenable to part-time or flexible work. The concentration of women in certain occupations that expose them to high levels of risk (e.g., domestic service) makes their work more precarious and subjects them to lower pay. In the sections that follow, we will discuss the evidence for policies that either theoretically should promote WEE or have been shown to improve WEE.

# The Case for Increasing Women's Economic Empowerment

## Economic Case

A significant amount of rigorous research exists on the positive relationship between economic growth and WEE (Elborgh-Woytek et al. 2013; Kabeer 2012). While there is evidence that the relationship is bidirectional, in this section, we focus on the effect of WEE on economic growth.

Economic theory suggests that when gender gaps in economic opportunity exist, the quality and quantity of the labor supply is distorted and inefficient, which affects productivity and economic growth. Numerous studies have found that gender gaps in LFP and entrepreneurship (women-owned business or self-employment) restrict overall economic growth (Abu-Ghaida and Klasen 2004; Agénor and Canuto 2013; Blackden et al. 2006). Studies also find that gender gaps in education and employment negatively affect economic growth. For example, Klasen and Lamanna (2009) found that gender gaps in education and employment account for a 0.9 to 1.7 percentage point difference in growth in the Middle East and North Africa and a 0.1 to 1.6 percentage point difference in per capita growth in East Asia. Cuberes and Teignier (2016) found that gender gaps in LFP and entrepreneurship negatively affect income per capita. They estimate that total female exclusion from entrepreneurship would result in an 11 percent decrease in income per capita, and total female exclusion from the labor force would have a larger impact, resulting in a 50 percent decrease. The authors found that impact on per capita income is larger in their sample of developing countries than in their OECD sample. Effects were most pronounced in the Middle East and North Africa, similar to Klasen and Lamanna's findings.

Women's unequal access to resources is another important factor in economic growth and productivity. In the agriculture industry, for example, research has shown that productivity for female-managed plots is lower than male-managed plots. Palacios-López and López (2015) estimated the labor productivity of female-managed plots in Malawi to be 44 percent lower than plots managed by males. Kilic, Palacios-López, and Goldstein (2015) estimated a 25 percent productivity gap in Malawi, similar to the 23 percent estimate in Ethiopia reported by Aguilar and colleagues (2015). Upon further investigation, the differences in productivity are caused not by gender but by unequal access to resources and inputs (endowment effects) and returns on these (structural effects). These resources

and inputs include male household labor, size and wealth, credit and liquidity, information and knowledge, time, membership organizations, equipment and technology, extension services, high-yield crops, and land.

With women making up an estimated 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in developing countries (Croppenstedt, Goldstein, and Rosas 2013), addressing the productivity gap is important to economic growth. In Malawi, 82 percent of the mean gender gap in agriculture, particularly in the first half of the productivity distribution, can be explained by the endowment effect. The structural effect, or the difference in returns on inputs and resources, accounts for 18 percent of the gap, but its size increases in the second half of the productivity distribution. Croppenstedt, Goldstein, and Rosas (2013) found that productivity does not improve with GDP growth, individual wealth growth, or use of resources, and suggest that to reduce the gender gap, we must not only provide women with access to resources but also address the “institutional, social and market factors” inhibiting women’s returns on these resources. For example, extension advice tends to be more attuned to the needs of male farmers, and the norms and customary institutions that govern rural land often disadvantage women.

## Business Case

Several studies provide empirical evidence that including and supporting female workers through reduced gender discrimination and family-friendly policies increases productivity at the firm level. The theory is that these policies allow firms to attract and hire more talented employees, improve retention rates, decrease employee stress and absenteeism, and allow more flexible operating hours, all of which can reduce cost and increase profit. Most of this evidence is based on case studies, but there are also a limited number of econometric studies that find a correlation between these policies and productivity. Abbas, Hameed, and Waheed (2011) found that discrimination in hiring, promotion, and provision of goods and facilities negatively affected employee productivity in the telecommunications sector in Pakistan. Baughman, DiNardi, and Holtz-Eakin (2003) found that flexible sick leave and child care assistance reduced turnover, but that firms offering these benefits also paid lower entry-level wages. Butts and Casper (2013) and Yasbek (2004) also found evidence that family-friendly policies reduced work/family conflict and improved productivity and work attitudes. However, there is also evidence that family-friendly policies do not improve productivity on their own, and that these policies simply correlate with better management practices (Bloom and Van Reenen 2006; Bloom, Kretschmer, and Van Reenan 2011). The existing evidence for the business case is weak because it has been difficult to separate correlation from causation.

Promoting women into managerial roles can improve efficiency, productivity, and allocation of talent. Macchiavello et al. (2015) tested the effectiveness of female supervisors in Bangladesh's garment sector, where 4 out of 5 production workers are women but just over 1 in 20 supervisors is a woman. They found that females are as capable as males in every task and type of responsibility, but that ingrained perceptions and beliefs on the role of women remain stronger than confidence in skills gained through training.

Gender-based violence is another dimension of WEE that, if not addressed, presents high costs to companies. Recent evidence shows that gender-based violence can reduce a staff member's presence at work by up to 11 days. Other costs include counseling, medical costs, recruitment, and induction costs.

## Development Case

Beyond country-level economic growth and firm-level productivity gains, the economic empowerment of women is also beneficial for the well-being of children, the health of local communities, and the overall development of countries through a wider distribution of the fruits of growth (Duflo 2012). The World Bank (2012) elaborates on the claims that WEE produces positive changes in family outcomes in terms of children's education, reduced child mortality, improved decisionmaking within the household, and women's ability and power to influence decisions in society.

A number of well-designed studies show that there are larger benefits for children when women control income (Duflo 2003; Lundberg, Pollak, and Wales 1997; Thomas 1990; 1993). These can include health benefits, such as increased survival probabilities and improved weight and height among girls (Duflo 2003; Thomas 1990). Empowering women as economic and political actors can change policy choices and make institutions more representative of citizens. In India, giving power to women at the local level led to greater provision of public goods, such as water and sanitation, which mattered more to women (Beaman et al. 2011). In the US, empowering women led to a significant decline in child mortality (Miller 2008).

There is also strong evidence of the educational benefits of WEE (de Carvalho Filho 2012; Thomas 1993). Greater earnings for women result in higher levels of school enrollment for girls, which in turn reduce child marriage or the incidence of risky sexual behavior (Duflo 2003; World Bank 2011). Lokshin, Glinskava, and Garcia (2000) found three benefits to the provision of low cost early childhood development programs in Kenya to support women's participation in the labor force. These programs increased the future productivity of children, freed the mother's time for market-based work, and

allowed older girl siblings to participate in schools. A focus on female beneficiaries in an old-age pension program in Brazil resulted in increased school enrollment and reduced child labor among girls (de Carvalho Filho 2012).

WEE also has the potential to improve overall national development through reduced fertility, which can increase women's LFP and children's education. Becker and Lewis (1973) and Becker, Murphy, and Tamura (1990) posit that a decline in fertility will increase investment in the human capital of children through a trade-off between quantity and quality of children. Upadhyay and colleagues (2014) reviewed the literature on fertility and WEE and found positive associations between WEE and lower fertility, longer birth intervals, and lower rates of unintended pregnancy. A decline in fertility can itself trigger further benefits to women outside of economic empowerment, such as better health outcomes, increased lifespan, and increased educational attainment for themselves and their children.



# Enablers of and Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment

The role women play in an economy is an outcome of complex economic, sociocultural, and institutional factors, and is also affected by local laws and policies. In this section, we discuss the barriers to and enablers of WEE, focusing on public policies specifically targeting women as beneficiaries and on other, broader policies that could disproportionately benefit women. Most developmental policies (e.g., focused on increasing piped water access or improving public transportation services) naturally affect men and women differently. But governments also implement women-focused interventions, such as microfinance schemes or maternal and child health programs.

## Broad-Based Policies not Specifically Targeting Women

The distributional effects of economic development policies or projects could create varying outcomes for men and women. This is true for both first- and second-order effects, some of which are better studied in the literature than others. We discuss several public policies and their societal impacts, focusing on ways in which they create divergent effects on men and women. In topics such as public infrastructure provision, technology adaptation, and informality, we find that women experience different outcomes than men. Decisionmakers should consider how seemingly gender-neutral programs result in intentional or unintentional gendered outcomes.

### Economic Growth

The discussion of WEE, particularly through LFP and productivity enhancement, must be situated within specific contexts of economic growth. Like any societal transformation, growth creates winners and losers that determine how WEE affects gross outcomes at the household and societal levels (Fox 2015). In countries experiencing rapid economic growth, the constantly increasing demand for labor and availability of better-paying jobs ensure that WEE does not become a zero-sum game between men and women. In other words, when the economy demands more workers, greater female inclusion in the labor market is less likely to adversely impact male counterparts.

Conceptually, women workers entering the labor market would simply replace men who have moved to better-paying jobs in high value-added sectors. Notwithstanding existing gender inequality, the ability of the economy to continue creating well-paying jobs ensures that greater female inclusion in the labor force does not necessarily come at the expense of men. Assuming women workers have in-demand education and skills, this could increase overall productivity and further boost growth at the macro level. Periods of rapid and sustained economic growth, such as in East Asia since the 1980s (Campos and Root 1996), decrease gender inequality because of the availability of more economic opportunities and competition among firms (Becker 1985; Boserup 1970). This results in the *pull* of women into the labor market, including into high-productivity sectors.

That said, the causal link between economic growth and WEE is far from clear in the literature and should be rigorously tested in future studies (Kabere and Natali 2013; World Bank 2012). Duflo (2012) in particular emphasizes that economic development without changes in broader social norms is insufficient for improving WEE. Based on empirical evidence from Germany, Tolciu and Zierahn (2012) find that, *ceteris paribus*, social and cultural norms play a central role in determining the extent to which women make use of available economic opportunities.

In conclusion, economic growth is a necessary but insufficient condition for improving WEE. This is why national governments, donors, and multilateral institutions implement the gender-specific policies that we discuss later.

## Public Services, Infrastructure, and Women in Urban Public Spaces

The quality and accessibility of public services, including basic utilities such as water and sanitation, electricity, and transportation, are known to impact societal well-being through improved productivity and economic growth. Barring a few subsectors such as water and sanitation, their distributional effects on men and women and resulting changes in household power dynamics are generally less studied.

Studies focused on female home-based workers in informal urban economies find that, *ceteris paribus*, lack of reliable access to basic services severely impedes WEE (Malik et al. 2016). In addition, public services increase quality of life in several ways, including by freeing up time for leisure and economically productive activities. The next section explores the mechanisms through which various forms of public infrastructure impact WEE. These mechanisms include (1) reducing the burden of household production, (2) increasing means of communication and access to technology, (3)

strengthening transportation, and (4) fostering a safer environment to reduce the fear of victimization and threat of violence in domestic and public realms.

## ELECTRIFICATION

In recent decades, several LMICs introduced major rural electrification programs intended to produce a variety of social and economic benefits with positive externalities such as freeing up human time, increasing labor supply, improving productivity through access to technology, and enhancing safety through street lighting. Several studies have found interesting gender dynamics within the household (e.g., greater female labor participation) and at the macro level (e.g., improved productivity). For instance, Khandker and colleagues (2014) find that electrification increases overall studying and working hours, with women taking greater advantage than men. Male students spend 6 more hours studying compared to 7.5 for women, and male workers increase hours worked by 1.5 percent compared to 17 percent for women.

In South Africa, Dinkelman (2011) found that women's adaptation of electric stoves resulted in robust increases in LFP at the intensive margin (i.e., women worked more hours without significant effects on men's economic activities). Several other studies found similar positive associations between electrification and female LFP in several countries, including Nicaragua (Grogan and Sadanand 2009), Guatemala (Grogan and Sadanand 2013), Colombia (Grogan 2012), and Bangladesh (Chowdhury 2010). Using data from Peru, Dasso and Fernandez (2015) support Dinkelman's findings by highlighting different effects of electrification on men and women, with the former largely unlikely to take up second jobs but the latter working longer hours.

In a recently published empirical study based on rigorous analysis of data from Nigeria, Salmon and Tanguy (2016) add a nuance to this literature they claim is based on "the strong but questionable assumption that labor supply decisions are independent within the household." By arguing that the labor supply decisions of husbands and wives are highly intertwined—contrary to earlier studies—they find that husbands end up working more hours than before electrification, resulting in "an increase in non-income generating activities (leisure or housework) for wives." This argument posits that when one spouse spends more time outside the home, the other likely substitutes by doing more household work. But while this is undoubtedly an important new finding in this literature, the authors warn that findings could be influenced by the poor quality of power supply in Nigeria. They may not apply to other (e.g., urban) contexts, where greater use of time-saving household appliances afford women more time to potentially undertake greater economic activity.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND STREET LIGHTING

Public investment in improving urban and regional and national-level transportation services is known to increase economic growth and productivity (Glaeser and Kohlhase 2003). In the context of labor markets, worker mobility improves their likelihood of finding better-paying jobs via improved worker-firm matching (Puga 2010). Because of the benefits of agglomeration, firms are more productive when spatially sorted to form clusters of similar industries (Storper and Venables 2004). But this well-documented phenomenon depends on the extent of workers' (including women) physical mobility across vast geographical areas. Thus, in places where large segments of the workforce are immobile because of poor transit coverage or fear of victimization, the economy functions suboptimally.

Further, access to safe and reliable public transportation, particularly in densely populated metropolitan areas, is essential for gender equality in LFP and, subsequently, WEE (Kabeer 2012). Many factors can impact men's and women's access to transportation, and each has differing mobility requirements because of job patterns, fear of crime, and threat perception among others. The large and rigorous literature on gender and mobility in high-income countries has found that women have particular safety and accessibility needs in public transportation that are seldom met (Hasson and Polevoy 2011; Loukaitou-Sideris and Fink 2009). Men and women have different commuting patterns, threat perceptions, and safety priorities that directly effect their propensity to participate in the labor market (Yavuz and Welch 2010). For instance, Gómez (2000) found that in Lima, Peru, men overwhelmingly preferred speedier public transportation, whereas women's top consideration was safety and avoidance of harassment. The limited applied literatures in urban and transport planning have posited specific design features that could help ease women's safety concerns (Riverson et al. 2005).

With a few exceptions, there is a dearth of empirical studies exploring the economic effects of the fear of victimization and crime in cities of the Global South. But a household transport survey in Lahore, Pakistan, found the modal and gendered distribution of commuting trips is skewed against working women, with 74 percent of commuting trips taken on foot (Malik 2013). This restricts the pool of accessible jobs and increases the already heavy burden on women's time, further hampering their ability to increase income and material well-being. Sur's (2014) work in Kolkata, India, demonstrates that women perceive the city as a "place of danger" and cope by restricting all types of activities within the public realm. But public interventions, such as safer and more convenient public transportation services and improved street lighting, could help improve gender equality, as documented recently by Ellsberg and colleagues (2015). In a few prominent cases, like the New Delhi metro rail system, women-only transportation services were introduced despite opposition from critics, who argue that such

approaches simply ignore “the root causes of violence against women in normal public transportation,” a reference to social norms regarding women’s position in urban public spaces (Dunckel-Graglia 2013). Although there is a shortage of literature evaluating the effects of such interventions, ongoing projects will likely produce tangible answers in the near future.<sup>4</sup>

However, there exists a burgeoning and robust literature on women’s fear of crime and victimization, including systematic reviews of many qualitative studies (e.g., by Lorenc et al. 2013). Often focusing on the geography of fear, this literature mostly studies urban public space in high-income countries to showcase how fear of victimization is a highly complicated subject (Pain 2000; Pain et al. 2006). Psychological studies have argued that well-lit areas encourage more ethical behavior (Chiou and Cheng 2013), and applied policy reviews show that poor lighting in public spaces, particularly transportation networks, increases women’s vulnerability (Crime Concern 2004). On the other hand, Pain and colleagues (2006) report only “a marginal and even then contradictory influence on the problems of crime and fear that people face” from improved street lighting, in line with earlier findings showing minimal impact on women’s safety in the United Kingdom (Pain 2000).

## WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES

The provision of clean drinking water and improved sanitation has been a major thrust of international development efforts, particularly as part of the MDGs. In recent years, gender mainstreaming has gained significant attention from multilateral development organizations (World Bank 2010), international NGOs (WaterAid 2009), bilateral donors (USAID 2013), and UN agencies (UNDP 2006). Through policy guidelines, practical toolkits, and training materials, they have pushed for improving the design of these services to benefit women. But regardless of such targeting, evidence in the literature points to tangible positive effects of improved water and sanitation services on WEE (Fontana and Elson 2014). Although there exists a large literature of varying levels of quality on the link between water and sanitation services and WEE broadly defined, we focus only on a selection of highly relevant studies whose findings are based on empirically rigorous analysis.

In a study focusing on women’s time burden in 25 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (2012) estimated women spend 15 million hours every day fetching water, which is still largely seen as a female responsibility. Independent studies based on data sets from Guinea (Blackden and Wodon 2006) and Tanzania (Budlender 2008) among others found that, on average,

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the ongoing DFID/IGC funded RCT by Field and Vyborny in Pakistan: Erica Field and Katherine Vyborny, “Public Transport and Urban Labour Market Integration: A Randomised Control Trial,” last updated January 28, 2016, <http://www.theigc.org/project/public-transport-and-urban-labour-market-integration-a-randomised-control-trial/>.

women in rural areas can spend up to three hours per week collecting drinking water for their families. In urban areas, that number is one hour per week. Further evidence from studies on public water provision in Kyrgyz villages (Meeks 2015) and piped water access in Morocco (Devoto et al. 2012) suggests that regardless of method, improvements in water provision significantly reduce women's time burden and allow more leisure time. In another study focused on Morocco, van Houweling and colleagues (2012) find evidence that better access to water systems expands women's economically productive activities from agriculture to commerce, including greater female entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, Koolwal and van de Walle's (2013) nine-country study finds that children living closer to public water points are more likely to attend school, but they find no evidence that it also improves women's employment. Overall, however, there is extensive and solid evidence in the literature supporting the view that improved water and sanitation services are associated with WEE, freeing up women's time to take on more economically productive activities inside and outside the home.

## Technology

Major worldwide advances in technology adaptation, both in workplaces and households, have well-documented effects on productivity. In South Africa, Klonner and Nolen (2010) found that the 15 percent increase in employment due to mobile phone uptake was mostly driven by women, particularly those who did not have significant child care responsibilities. The SDGs recognize the critical role of technology in enhancing women's participation in the economy. Eliminating barriers to their physical participation through teleworking is one way to achieve that. In several high- and low-income countries, smartphone applications are being used to map, analyze, and address women's fear of crime in public spaces and improve their urban mobility (Solymosi, Bowers, and Fujiyama 2015; Wendt and Exner 2013). Broadband technology is also said to make education more accessible to women and girls through massive open online courses, which are particularly useful to women traditionally confined to the indoors.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) often give women with marketable skills and education the choice of accessing jobs and other markets from the safety and convenience of their homes (Gill et al. 2010). Mobile technologies have been shown to improve home-based workers' access to information, allowing them to circumvent middlemen, increase profit margins, and consequently experience increased empowerment. There is widespread empirical evidence indicating that ICTs are instrumental in increasing women's LFP (Black and Spitz-Oener 2007) particularly in high productivity

sectors (World Bank 2016) that are not physically demanding (Rendall 2010; Weiberg 2000)). They can also stimulate changes in social norms and attitudes toward women's role in society (Jensen and Oster 2009) through social media campaigns supporting legislation such as the "My Dress, My Choice" movement in Kenya (Santos and Seol 2015).

Focusing on the effects of the broader societal uptake of ICTs and particularly mobile phones across India, Malhotra and colleagues (2012) find evidence that women entrepreneurship improved due to time saved and greater access to markets. Similarly, an impact evaluation of a cash transfer program in Niger by Aker, Boumniel, and Tierney (2016) found mobile money had an instrumental role in improving crop output. They attribute this to two factors: the relatively low cost of technology adaptation and women benefiting from greater privacy, enabling them to make choices more freely.

In societies where prevalent social norms put almost the entire burden of cooking and child care on women, technology is directly improving their empowerment, as discussed in the section on electrification. But the degree of improvement exhibits variations based on the geographical, social, and economic characteristics of women and their households (Masika and Bailur 2015). In other words, more educated women living in cities could potentially reap disproportionate benefits from ICTs compared to rural women, who presumably have limited educational attainment and ICT literacy (World Bank 2016). Overall, the extent to which ICTs help improve WEE depends largely on women's digital literacy, educational attainment, marketability of any skillsets, and prevalent social norms.

## **Policies to Reduce Informal Sector**

The persistence of large informal sectors within LMIC economies is a defining feature of their economic system that has remained robust since the 1950s, both in relative and absolute terms (Ghani and Kanbur 2015). According to UN (2015) statistics, the percentage of women in nonagricultural jobs working in the informal sector is 80 percent in South Asia, 74 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 54 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. This has been the subject of much scholarship across the social sciences and particularly economics, where discussions have focused on how formalization enables growth (for reviews, see Chen 2001 and Meagher 2013). With a few exceptions, there is broad agreement in the economics literature that reducing the size of the informal sector is a desirable long-term goal, although its complete elimination is probably impossible (Gërkhani 2004).

All types of workers in the informal economy, and particularly self-employed workers, are more vulnerable to exploitation and more likely to be trapped in precarious employment situations than

those with formal employment contracts (Jutting and de Laiglesia 2009). There is clear evidence that women in the informal economy, including home-based and domestic workers, face even greater vulnerabilities due to the absence of job security, fringe benefits, or social protection services such as unemployment benefits or child care support (Malik et al. 2016; Williams and Lansky 2013). This is why ILO has promoted regulations on domestic workers (ILO 2011). Conversely, formalization can impose financial and managerial burdens on smaller firms, adversely impacting their growth potential (de Mel et al. 2011; Rocha, Rachter, and Ulyseas 2014).

For several reasons, governments routinely introduce policies to reduce the relative size of the informal sector, including through deregulation of businesses through incentive schemes to bring firms into the tax net (Chen 2007). Further, protecting and sustaining women's livelihoods through legislation (Kucera and Roncolato 2012), promoting worker rights through self-help groups (Brody et al. 2016), and greater private sector engagement (de Haan 2016) are popular policy responses, all of which are expected to increase public revenue generation and stimulate economic development. Practical interventions of groups like the Women in Information Employment: Globalizing and Organizing network and Self-Employed Women's Association, both of which promote equal rights for informal working women, have been subject to evaluations. Studies find that improved public service delivery, particularly in the water, sanitation and health sectors, and greater microfinancing can vastly improve the lives of these female workers (Aggarwal 2008; Desai and Joshi 2014).

In sum, much literature on the informal sector exists but with a rather limited focus on its direct impact on WEE or the precariousness of women's jobs. But existing evidence makes clear that any public policies that bring more workers into the formal sector will likely improve women's work conditions.

## Gender-Specific Policies

### Child care

Child care is a crucial issue for WEE. As a recent Overseas Development Institute report (Samman et al. 2016) summarizes, the need to care for dependent children contributes substantially to time poverty among women and restricts both their LFP and the types of jobs they have. Children do, of course, have two parents, and if one regards child care as a service that allows both parents to work, it might not be



categorized as a gender-specific policy. As a practical matter, however, the care of children and other dependents usually falls to women, as discussed above.

There is a wealth of evidence that the availability of child care in some form is associated with an increase in women's LFP (Samman et al. 2016), and some of this evidence supports a causal role for child care (Angeles et al. 2014; Paes de Barros et al. 2011). For women who want to work, the availability of child care clearly alleviates barriers to work and undoubtedly provides needed peace of mind (Cassirer and Addati 2007; Ferus-Comelo 2012).

There is surprisingly little evidence that the provision of child care reduces time poverty among women and girls, despite ample documentation that women are more likely than men to experience time poverty and that having young children increases a woman's risk of time poverty (Ribeiro and Marinho 2012). Zacharias and colleagues (2012) find that the use of child care is associated with a reduction in time poverty in Korea, particularly among those who are employed, but they calculated that decline indirectly. It is important to remember that when child care is available, women may simply do other work rather than experience an increase in leisure or sleep. Several studies document that unpaid work does not decline commensurately when women do paid work (Samman et al. 2016), so that available child care appears to encourage female LFP should not be interpreted to mean that time poverty has been reduced among women.

There is substantial evidence from qualitative studies that women working in the informal sector do so partly because of a lack of child care and the flexibility that informal work provides to combine work and child care (see Cassirer and Addati 2007 for a review). We found, however, no rigorous research demonstrating that the provision of child care moves women from the informal to formal sector; this is a difficult proposition to prove, given that there is evidence that decisions about child care and decisions about work are made jointly (Quisumbing, Hallman, and Ruel 2003). There is, however, evidence that the availability of child care and a drop in the price of child care is associated with an increase in the hours women work (Berlinski, Galiani, and McEwan 2011; Hallman et al. 2005; Paes de Barros et al. 2011), which may make women's incomes less precarious.

A positive externality that derives from the widespread availability of child care is benefits for children. Evidence from low- and middle-income countries (Leroy, Gadsden, and Guijarro 2011) demonstrates positive effects of high-quality early childhood education on children's developmental outcomes, although the effects on health and nutrition are less clear. Evidence from the United States (Duncan and Magnuson 2011) suggests that high-quality early childhood education can alleviate

socioeconomic inequities in children's developmental outcomes, and there is some evidence for this in LMICs as well. Not all child care is of high quality, however.

Another consequence of widely provided child care is the creation of jobs for women. In Mexico, one public program that provides child care claims to have created over 46,000 jobs (Staab and Gerhard 2011). Labor economics suggests that if women take these jobs, it must mean they believe the jobs will make them better off. Also, entering the labor force may have long-run benefits as women maintain attachment to the labor force over time. From this point of view, the expansion of formal child care also has this positive externality. There is controversy about whether or not this is an overall benefit to women, however. The jobs that are created through expansion of child care or child development work are poorly paid, undervalued, and reinforce the gender segregation of occupations (Palriwala and Neetha 2010; Staab and Gerhard 2011). Certainly, the creation of these jobs does not constitute a force moving women into the most productive sections of the economy.

There are a number of strategies for making child care accessible to women. In India, legislation requires that companies provide child care if they employ 30 or more women (Ferus-Comelo 2012), although noncompliance is widespread. In Mexico, the state provides resources to individuals and organizations that actually provide the care (Staab and Gerhard 2011). In Chile, child care is publicly provided by the Ministry of Education with the goal of enhancing children's development and facilitating women's LFP (Staab and Gerhard 2011). These different strategies have advantages and disadvantages, and there is some evidence that employer mandates can have negative impacts on female wages (Prada, Rucci, and Urzua 2015).

Two issues that cut across different strategies for the provision of child care are coverage and the maintenance of minimal standards of care. In Bangalore, even companies that comply with the employer mandate to provide child care routinely restrict the age of children in crèches to 3 and under (Ferus-Comelo 2012), leaving mothers of older children in the lurch. The same study finds that some employer-provided crèches do not meet minimal standards of safety and health.

In developing policy about child care, it is important to remember that one size of child care does not fit all. For example, in Bangalore, not all women who have access to employer-provided child care are able to use it, and one study cited the inability of women to carry children the distance they need to walk to work (Ferus-Comelo 2012).

It is also important to note that millions of parents of young children do not use formal child care. Rather, they rely on older relatives such as grandmothers or older children, particularly sisters, to provide child care. These relatives are essentially subsidizing women's economic activities, and one

policy proposal is the idea that employers or the state would provide some support for these caregivers in light of that subsidy (Samman et al. 2016).

Overall, the quality of the evidence linking child care to WEE is moderate but certainly sufficient to justify policies that help women find care for their children.

## Legal Shifts

We documented above the fact that women have less access to land, which is partly responsible for lower overall levels of agricultural productivity in many countries. One reason for this is that inheritance laws in some countries preclude daughters from inheriting land, and other countries have family law dictating that husbands control their wives' property. Rabenhorst and Bean (2011) make a set of recommendations for how countries can revise their laws regarding family life and inheritance to redress gender inequities in access to land.

There is some rigorous evidence that changing these laws has positive effects on women. In India, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 had provisions that were disadvantageous to daughters. In the 1980s and 1990s, several Indian states passed amendments to make the law less discriminatory. Deininger, Goyal, and Nagarajan (2010) assessed whether or not these changes have been effective and found that these amendments have resulted in more female inheritance of land, a higher age at marriage for women, and higher education for women. In Ethiopia, a revised family code introduced in 2000 increased gender equality. A rigorous study established that its passage was associated with an increase in the proportion of women in highly productive occupations (Hallward-Driemeier and Gajigo 2015). The same authors found that although the law appeared to increase non-home work for all women, it was particularly effective in increasing highly productive work among young women by raising the age at marriage.

Changing laws at the constitutional or national level is a necessary but insufficient step toward establishing equity in land access for women. For example, local leaders in Namibia discouraged younger women from applying for land rights, although older women profited from laws requiring gender neutrality (UN Women 2013). It is important that national policy change is accompanied by training of local and traditional authorities in how to administer such policies. Studies of the effects of legal shifts on WEE are rigorous but confined (by necessity) to particular contexts. Evidence from more countries would be valuable.

## Access to Extension Services

There is weak evidence that changes to agricultural extension policies will help WEE. Larson, Murray, and Palacios-Lopez (2015) found that women in Uganda have less access than men to extension services, which provide valued resources to farmers that improve agricultural productivity. Croppenstedt, Goldstein, and Rosas (2013) identify several reasons for this, including: (1) the assumption on the part of extension workers that men are the decisionmakers, (2) a focus by extension workers on larger farms that women are less likely to own, and (3) gender discrimination. A policy response to this barrier is the cultivation of female extension agents (Sakho, Lunde, and Arribas-Banos 2009), which is particularly important in places where there are cultural restrictions on women speaking to men outside their families. This policy response has the positive externality of helping women enter occupations traditionally dominated by men. Another policy response is extension efforts specifically targeted at groups of female farmers (Larson, Murray, and Palacios-Lopez 2015).

## Certification

One practice to promote gender equity in the formal employment sector is certification of firms as gender equitable. One model for this is the gender equity model (GEM) developed by the World Bank, whereby companies volunteer to earn an official certification as a gender-equitable firm. The goal is to institutionalize gender equity by assessing and amending processes regarding recruitment, training, women's advancement, and sexual harassment (Castro 2007). The model was initially implemented in Mexico and has since expanded to Chile, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and Egypt (Pungiluppi, Castro, and Munoz-Boudet 2010). A survey of participating firms in Mexico indicated some limited success (Castro 2007), even in the very short term. The model is being formally promoted by the government in Chile and Mexico (Pungiluppi, Castro, and Munoz-Boudet 2010). Implementation in Egypt was accompanied by a quasi-experimental evaluation. The evaluation did not show any effect on firm hiring or promotion, although treatment firms exhibited better employee satisfaction (Johansson de Silva, Paci, and Posadas 2014). Because GEM is being implemented in several places, it would be ideal if these implementations were accompanied by rigorous evaluations. Such evaluations are one of the few ways that rigorous evidence can be brought to bear on whether or not there is a strong business case for WEE. It is important that these evaluations gear up for the long or at least the medium term, because one would not expect changes in productivity and other indicators of success to happen immediately after certification.

There are also other efforts at gender equitable certification, such as the Women's Empowerment Principles (UN 2011). This is a set of principles for firms intended to create a gender-equitable working environment. The CEO of a firm may sign a statement of support that connotes a willingness to incorporate the principles into their firm's practice.

## **Reduction of Violence against Women and Girls**

In a systematic review of impact evaluations on violence against women, Arango and colleagues (2014) found that over 70 percent of studies were focused on industrialized countries. A more recent review by Ellsberg and colleagues (2015) also points to major gaps in our understanding of this issue in LMICs, mainly due to the lack of rigorous impact evaluations. Much of this literature, including studies discussed by Mejia and colleagues (2016), focus on how various programs and development-focused interventions effect the incidence of violence. For instance, Raghavendra and colleagues (2013) find IPV causing worker absenteeism, resulting in economic losses of 1.27 and 1.28 percent in Uganda and Bangladesh, respectively. Similarly, Ribero and Sánchez (2014) estimate that 0.85 percent of Colombia's GDP is being lost to violence against women, while Pronyk and colleagues (2006) found that microfinance programs in South Africa reduced IPV by 50 percent. The incidence of sexual violence against women has direct impacts on their LFP, which Sabia and colleagues (2013) find to be 6.6 percent besides 5.1 percent reductions in wages. Thus, violence against women directly impacts productivity for both individuals and entire economies (Uma Devi 2005).

On the other hand, Blattman and colleagues (2013) found no effects on IPV or WEE for a female-targeted cash transfer in Northern Uganda. Following a literature review on IPV, Vyas and Watts (2009) conclude that there is, at best, mixed evidence on the effect of improved female income levels on their vulnerability to violence. Understanding the reasons for and outcomes of violence against women requires a thorough understanding of specific societal contexts, which True (2012) has termed "the political economy of violence against women." Kabeer (2000) quotes a Bangladeshi garment worker who would feel more secure with an abusive husband than being a single working woman. But despite these difficulties, the measurement of the economic cost of violence has received much attention in the literature, particularly through innovative empirical techniques to arrive at specific dollar values (Faley et al. 1999; Mackay and Bould 1997).

Driven fundamentally by fear of victimization, these de facto restrictions prevent women from engaging in any economic activities within the public domain that hurt productivity (Adejumo and Azuh 2013). For instance, women employed in regular day jobs are unable to take second jobs due to

restricted physical mobility at night. This is one clear mechanism through which violence adversely affects material well-being at the household level, in turn affecting macro-level economic productivity. In fact, Vyas and colleagues (2015) find mixed evidence as to whether paid work outside the home increases women's net vulnerability to violence.

# Conclusion

WEE is not necessary simply on the grounds of human rights and equality, as important as those goals are. An extensive body of literature argues that WEE will also advance and accelerate the process of economic development. Businesses with gender-equitable processes for hiring and promotion, benefits for men *and* women promoting work-family balance, and systems to prevent and address sexual harassment in the workplace are more likely to become more productive, although we need more rigorous evidence on this. WEE will help endow the next generation of working women *and* men with good health and the skills to fill jobs provided by the growing economy.

There are many aspects to WEE, but a central theme across its many domains is the ability of women to make the choices that are best for them. Currently, despite laudable progress for women across many indicators, there are still barriers that constrain women's choices and too few tools in place that enable women to make optimal choices. For example, there is still enormous gender inequity in household production. The burden of care work that women carry limits their ability to work in the labor force while facilitating men's work, reinforcing a gendered division of labor. Women often seek work in the informal sector, which is precarious because of its limited worker protections, unreliability, and low pay. The main reason women choose precarious work is that it is the only work that has the flexibility they need to perform their familial responsibilities. In addition, unequal access to resources prevents women from working as productively as possible, which has negative consequences for women and the economy as a whole.

One of the most important tools that enables women to make good choices is a legal system that promotes gender equity. The elimination of legal barriers to inheritance and the legal requirements for securing a husband's permission to work, an important step in and of itself, may have additional positive benefits.

Although they are not always regarded as policies that promote WEE, investments in infrastructure, most importantly electrification and piped water, will substantially reduce the amount of time that women spend in household production. These investments are essential to relieving the time poverty that impedes women's health and well-being and prevents them from working in the labor force.

These infrastructure investments, however, will not relieve one of the major factors that constrain women's economic choices. Women usually have more responsibility than men for childrearing and caring for the frail elderly and people with disabilities. Wider availability of dependent care, particularly

child care, will make LFP easier for those women who want to work and may move women into more secure work. Child care can be publicly provided, as in Mexico, or provided by employers either voluntarily or through mandate, as in India. Firms that provide family-friendly benefits, such as child care, profit through higher worker satisfaction and lower absenteeism.

Women will be less productive at work if they lack the necessary resources, such as land, credit, and extension services, to be as productive as men. It is in the interest of all countries to ensure that women have access to these resources to raise the productivity of the overall economy while achieving gender equity. Outside of the agricultural sector, policies that encourage firms to become certified as gender equitable are another strategy to support pay equity, which is a central part of all such schemes, as is promoting women's access to the same promotion opportunities as men.

A reduction in the size of the informal sector of the economy is desirable for many reasons, and because women are disproportionately working in this sector, policies designed to achieve that end will disproportionately benefit women even if they are not specifically designed to promote WEE.

Violence against women has implications for WEE, despite the fact that this is normally framed as a women's health issue. Fear of violence at home, on the way to work, and in the workplace are major barriers to women choosing what is best for them. The careful design of public transit systems can play a role in reducing fear of violence on the way to work, and systems to reduce workplace violence are an important part of gender-equitable workplaces.

In sum, WEE will be accomplished by eliminating barriers such as the burden of care work and by promoting factors that enable women to make optimal choices, such as laws that mandate gender equity. Sometimes, this will involve policies and activities that are not specifically directed toward women but will disproportionately affect them, such as infrastructure investments and efforts to reduce informal work. Others, such as the creation of gender-equitable workplaces, will require specifically targeted policies. All countries should support the expansion of WEE because it promotes economic growth for both individual businesses and nations as a whole.



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## STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

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