The UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment

The High-Level Panel (HLP) on Women’s Economic Empowerment

Investing in women’s economic empowerment is intrinsic to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication, and inclusive economic growth.

Yet despite the important progress that has been made in these areas, large gender gaps in economic opportunities and outcomes still remain across all countries and regions. Therefore in the context of the 2030 Agenda, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the first-ever High-Level Panel for Women’s Economic Empowerment. The Panel, comprised of influential leaders from various fields of government, business, academia, and civil society, will make action-oriented recommendations on how to improve economic outcomes for women in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, promoting women’s leadership in driving economic growth, and galvanizing political will power.

Rationale for Establishment of the High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment

Women’s economic empowerment is critical to achieving both the SDGs and Planet 50/50 by 2030. With the recent adoption of the SDGs, now is the time to address the large gender gaps in economic opportunities and outcomes that exist in almost all countries. Women earn less, have fewer assets, bear the burden of unpaid work and care, and are largely concentrated in vulnerable and low-paying activities. To illustrate such a disparity, the gap between women’s and men’s labor force participation is 26%, while women spend 2.5 times more time performing unpaid care and domestic work than men. Globally, women on average are paid 24% less than men. Moreover, 75% of women’s employment in developing regions is informal and unprotected. These gaps constrain women’s rights and hinder economic growth and productivity. Public investment and financial commitment from donors to women’s economic empowerment is insufficient and the gendered impacts of international public and private investments are not well recognized or understood. Significantly scaled-up actions and political will are required to ensure that governments, development organisations, and others ensure women and girls benefit from and participate in sustainable economic development.

Why establish a High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment now?

With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development coming into effect, 2016 presents an unprecedented opportunity to bring the countries and citizens of the world together to embark on a new path to improve the lives of people everywhere.
This new agenda is based on 17 goals, including a stand-alone goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5). This particular global goal clearly recognises the importance of women’s empowerment as a prerequisite for ending poverty, with a specific focus on their economic empowerment. However, for the goals to be reached, everyone needs to do their part: governments, the private and public sectors, and civil society. So the moment is now to provide concrete guidance for implementation.

Against this backdrop, the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level-Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment has been created to:

- demonstrate leadership and commitment;
- highlight key areas for accelerating women’s economic empowerment; and
- make action-oriented recommendations on how governments, business, civil society and development partners can work together to improve economic outcomes for women and girls.

**Composition of the High-Level Panel**

Serving in their personal capacities, the Co-chairs of the Panel are Ms. Simona Scarpaleggia, CEO of IKEA Switzerland and Mr. Luis Guillermo Solis, President of Costa Rica. Other members of the panel include the leaders of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank Group, UN Women, and a diverse range of eminent gender equality actors, economics experts, academics, trade union leaders, and business and government representatives from all over the world.

**Expected Output of the Panel**

The High-Level Panel is committed to delivering real action on the ground, moving us from promises to real, achievable targets to improve economic outcomes for women around the world.

In September 2016 the Panel will present its first report to the UN Secretary-General. Lead author Professor Laura Tyson will draw on rigorous evidence and broad-based consultations to highlight best practices and provide action-oriented recommendations.

The report will call upon everyone to do their part to place women’s economic empowerment at the center of the global agenda and lay out commitments to specific actions and interventions to demonstrate that progress is possible now. These actions will range from the scaling up of existing initiatives, the creation of innovative programmes, to governmental action like treaty ratification and legislative reforms. It will outline a strategic agenda focused on major issues where the panelists, both individually and collectively, from member states, civil society, and the private and public sectors will bring about change in the near term.

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1 See Attachment 1 for the list of High-Level Panel Members.
Building on the findings of September’s report, the Panel will then present its second report in March 2017.

Meetings of the High-Level Panel

The inaugural meeting of the High-Level Panel was held on 15 March 2016 during the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women at UN Headquarters in New York. A global consultation followed during the continuation of the meeting.

The Panel will hold its next meetings in June 2016 in Costa Rica and, coinciding with the 71st High-Level debate of the UN General Assembly in September 2016, at UN Headquarters in New York.

A series of regional consultations will continue in various fora for several months at the regional and levels, focusing on specific themes to further inform the report’s recommendations.

High-Level Panel Support and Resources

The High-Level Panel (HLP) is supported by an independent Secretariat, hosted by UN Women, made possible through the financial support of the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development.

Professor Laura Tyson has been engaged as lead author to prepare the September report. A pool of experts is being identified as a resource to submit topic papers, peer-review articles, and draft specific sections of the report.

Dr. Margo Thomas has been appointed as the Chief of the Secretariat.

The High-Level Panel contribute to the implementation of the SDGs?

The Panel will identify best practices in overcoming constraints to women’s economic empowerment and advocate investment in tackling these issues to foster decent work, entrepreneurship, and equal access to resources, services, education, information, communications technology, energy, infrastructure, and productive assets.

As women’s economic empowerment is pertinent to most all of the 17 SDGs, recommendations from the Panel will purposefully guide accelerated progress on multiple targets in the framework, such as equal access to economic resources and basic services; ownership and control over land and other property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services; redistribution of unpaid care work; more and better jobs; and protection and promotion of labour rights, amongst others.
How will the Panel work?

The September report will largely draw on existing research and rely on partnerships with key agencies and experts to move the agenda forward.

The Panel will then work to ensure that its findings are grounded in the needs and priorities of the most marginalized women. Its findings will be informed by evidence-based research and recommendations by women’s rights organisations working with marginalized women in both the global north and south.

Additionally, the work of the High-Level Panel will be informed by consultations with key stakeholders around the world. A series of events will take advantage of existing fora – like the Bank-Fund spring meetings, the AWID conference, and Women Deliver, complemented by virtual consultations.

The Focus of the Panel’s work

After reviewing a wide range of topics at its March meeting, Panel members endorsed a focus on six major issue areas:

1. Eliminating legal barriers to female economic empowerment
2. Addressing the care economy
3. Reducing gender pay gaps
4. Expanding opportunities for women who work informally
5. Promoting financial and digital inclusion for women
6. Fostering female entrepreneurship and enhancing the productivity of women-owned enterprises

In each of the six major issue areas that Panel members have agreed upon, the Report will underscore the role of social norms and attitudes that impede women’s economic empowerment, even in the presence of supportive economic policies and business practices. The Report will emphasize the two-way relationships between gender equality in society — in societal norms and in such areas as legal protections and security against violence — and economic gender equality. The macroeconomic gains and implications will be appropriately highlighted, including the gains from investments in the care economy.
High-Level Panel Members

H.E. Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera, President of Costa Rica
Deputy: Ms. Alejandra Mora Mora, Minister for the Status of Women

Ms. Simona Scarpaleggi, CEO, IKEA Switzerland
Deputy: Mr. Aurel Hosennen, PR & Communications Manager, IKEA Switzerland

Ms. Alicia Girón González, Professor and Researcher, Economic Research Institute (IIEc)
Deputy: Ms. Fernanda Vidal Correa, Research Fellow, Panamerican University

Mr. Amadou Mahtar Ba, Co-Founder and Executive Chairman, AllAfrica Global Media Inc.
Deputy: Ms. Nanjira Sambuli, Research Lead, iHub

Ms. Christine Lagarde, Managing Director, International Monetary Fund
Deputy: Ms. Kalpana Kochhar, Deputy Director and Leader of the IMF’s Gender Working Group

Ms. Fiza Farhan, CEO Buksh Foundation, Director Buksh Energy Pvt. Ltd
Deputy: Ms. Mahwish Javaid, Social Impact Innovations Officer, Concern Worldwide

Ms. Elizabeth Vazquez, CEO and Co-Founder, WEConnect International
Deputy: Ms. Greta Schettler, WEConnect International

Mr. Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organization (ILO)
Deputy: Ms. Shauna Olney, Chief of the Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch, ILO

Mr. Jim Yong Kim, President, World Bank
Deputy: Ms. Caren Grown, World Bank Group Senior Director, Gender

Ms. Justine Greening, Secretary of State for International Development
Deputy: Ms. Liz Ditchburn, Director of Policy, Department for International Development

Mr. Michael Spence, Professor of Economics at the Stern School at NYU

Ms. Mitchell Baker, Executive Chairwoman, Mozilla Foundation
Deputy: Ms. Anar Simpson, Special Advisor, Office of the Chair, Women Girls and Technology at Mozilla

Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women
Deputy: Ms. Meg Jones, Chief, Economic Empowerment Section, UN Women
Ms. Renana Jhabvala, Chair, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)
*Deputy: Ms. Jenna Harvey, Department of Urban Studies & Planning Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

Ms. Saadia Zahidi, Head of Employment and Gender Initiatives, World Economic Forum
*Deputy: Ms. Paulina Padilla, Specialist at World Economic Forum*

H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan, Vice-President, United Republic of Tanzania
*Deputy: Ms. Siriel Shaidi Mchembe, Lecturer Institute of Finance Management, Specialist of Social Protection and Women Entrepreneurship*

Ms. Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
*Deputy: Ms. Chidi King, Director of the Equality Department of the ITUC*

H.E. Sheikha Lubna bint Khalid bin Sultan Al Qasimi, Minister for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates
*Deputy: Ms. Amna Al Muhairy, Director of the Human Rights Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Ms. Tina Fordham, Managing Director, Chief Global Political Analyst, Citi Research

Ms. Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam International
*Deputy: Ms. Lan Mercado, Deputy Advocacy and Campaigns Director of Oxfam International*