EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ECONOMIES

Tukuri Marie Chantal is an active member of a cooperative in Cameroon preparing to access expanded markets and economic opportunities linked to a new road.
DECENT WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO REALIZING WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND WELL-BEING, AND BOOSTING THE PRODUCTIVITY OF ECONOMIES AT LARGE. Yet women still occupy a disproportionate share of poor quality jobs, endure a long-standing gender pay gap, and shoulder an unfair burden of unpaid domestic and care work. Drawing together diverse partnerships, from grass-roots women’s groups to international development banks, UN Women helps connect more women to economic opportunities and assets. Our efforts concentrate foremost on reaching women at the furthest and least-protected margins, such as domestic workers and smallholder farmers. On a broader scale, through evolving national policymaking and global norm-setting, we challenge the patterns in economies that continue to perpetuate women’s exclusion.

REACHING THE MOST MARGINALIZED

For women on the margins of society, hopes for a better life often stir once they organize together to claim their rights. In CAPE VERDE, more than a quarter of employed women struggle to get by as domestic workers. Most lack contracts or social protections such as pensions. But they have started to claim their right to decent work through the Association of Cape Verdean Domestic Employees. Backed by UN Women, it now links 13,000 workers across the country. In 2018, the Association worked closely with government officials to develop regulations for domestic workers in line with international commitments under CEDAW and the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Women once vulnerable to exploitation now have rules for contracts, and standards related to work hours, salaries and vacation time.

Reaching women who come from marginalized communities in CAMEROON has been linked to a rural road-building project initiated by the Government with funding from The Development Bank of Central African States. With trade and populations expected to boom, UN Women is supporting training for 20,000 women along the road to gain financial and entrepreneurial skills, and improve farming techniques to meet the demands of new markets.

Through UN Women’s Markets for Change programme, women market vendors in remote rural communities in FIJI, SOLOMON ISLANDS and VANUATU have created 19 vendor associations with over 7,500 registered members, giving them a voice in making markets safe and well managed. Over 2,500 women have taken part in training in financial literacy and business practices. Over 1,000 women have learned new agricultural practices to improve the produce they sell in the markets.

For many women, migration for work is an empowering choice, but many others are left vulnerable to a litany of risks and human rights violations, including exploitative labour. In 2018, the first international blueprint for keeping migration safe was agreed: the Global Compact for Migration. As a result of UN Women’s efforts and the commitment of UN Member States and other actors, the Global Compact includes human rights and gender-responsive approaches as core guiding principles, along with provisions to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
CALLING FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIES

Around the world, widening economic inequalities have become an increasingly stark reality, driven by stagnating wages and poor quality employment, among other factors. Yet proposed solutions mainly revolve around giving employers more flexibility, even if that means weakening workers’ rights, and lowering taxes for corporations and the wealthy. In 2019, UN Women called attention to how current economic models have failed to address the gender dimension of inclusiveness. A compendium of thought pieces by leading feminist economists, *Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth: Economic Policies to Achieve Sustainable Development*, considers what genuinely gender-inclusive economies might look like. It argues for patterns of growth that ‘equalize up,’ including by creating decent work and productive employment for all women and men, and ending the discriminatory burden of unpaid care and domestic work placed on women and girls. Guarding against harmful inclusion requires applying human rights principles to guide all trade, industrial, macroeconomic, finance and investment policies.

In ETHIOPIA, UN Women plays an active part in both shaping national economic policy and transforming local economies to open more opportunities for women. Partnership with the World Bank and other major donors factored gender into the 2019 national Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Assessment for the first time, based on a gender gap analysis supported by UN Women. Collaboration with the International Monetary Fund drew the attention of high-level officials in the Ministry of Finance to new evidence on the profound contribution gender equality can make to economic growth.

In tandem, to reach women directly in remote and impoverished rural areas, UN Women helped lead a coordinated UN drive to boost the livelihoods of smallholder women farmers. Nearly 3,000 have now gone through training on planting techniques that has improved productivity, strengthened food security and raised incomes. Women-led local cooperatives teach leadership and management skills – and allow the women to pool their resources to purchase equipment such as tractors. The benefits of the programme extend far beyond the women themselves, accruing to 14,000 family members and 32,000 community members.
INCREASING RESILIENCE TO A CHANGING CLIMATE

Under its Global Flagship Programme on Climate Smart Agriculture, UN Women has piloted the innovative Buy from Women platform. An open source ERP (enterprise resource planning) system developed specifically for women farmers helps them gain fast access to information, markets and finance – all the essentials for establishing viable commercial enterprises. Digital land records aid women in securing their assets; mobile wallets mean they can easily access banking services. Several countries are now adopting the system, including HAITI, where the focus is on opportunities for women in cocoa production, given rising global demand.

WOMEN IN SENEGAL LEARN CLIMATE-SMART FARMING TECHNIQUES, GAIN LINKS TO LARGER PRIVATE SECTOR MANUFACTURERS AND EXPORTERS, AND CULTIVATE MARKETING SKILLS.

A partnership between UN Women and the BNP Paribas Group in SENEGAL is aimed at reaching more than 30,000 women farmers in five areas of the country that are vulnerable to poverty and climate change. The programme fosters access to finance and productive resources, and brings women into higher-value agriculture, such as shea butter and rice production. Women learn climate-smart farming techniques, gain links to larger private sector manufacturers and exporters, and cultivate marketing skills.

In line with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, UN Women worked with governments in the CARIBBEAN, the PHILIPPINES and SERBIA to ensure that plans to combat land degradation and drought involve women in decision-making, strengthen women’s land rights and access to resources, integrate women’s economic empowerment, and enhance their access to knowledge and technologies.

Photo, left: In rural Ethiopia, Kamso Bame plans to install a new roof with higher earnings from more productive methods to breed sheep.
Above: A safe and clean place to rest after travelling long distances is among the many facilities that now support women market vendors in Fiji.
A global gathering agrees to close infrastructure and service gaps

UN Women serves as the substantive Secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the world’s largest annual gathering on gender equality.

REPRESENTATIVES FROM MORE THAN 163 STATES AND OVER 5,200 MEMBERS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ATTENDED THE 63RD SESSION IN MARCH 2019.

In two weeks of intense dialogue, ministers, senior government officials and other stakeholders deliberated on a comprehensive agenda for achieving social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure that are gender-responsive and advance the rights of women and girls. Persistent and often large gender gaps in these areas, such as in pensions, parental leave, health care, and water and sanitation, are among the steepest obstacles to ending discrimination.

The resulting Agreed Conclusions adopted by Member States provide a road map of measures for countries to close the gaps, end discrimination and address the needs of different groups of women and girls. The measures encompass increased investments in social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, coupled with assurances that spending will be protected from budget cuts that could undermine progress over time. Member States stressed the imperative of recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work, and scaling up quality, affordable public care services, as well as mobilizing resources, strengthening women’s participation and improving the evidence base. Other measures aim to guarantee safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation, end violence against women and girls, and ensure that transport planning accounts for the different needs of women and men, along with persons with disabilities and older people.

Photo: As members of the next generation, Girl Scouts and Girl Guides came to the Commission to share their views on stepped-up actions to achieve gender equality.
EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD, WOMEN SHOULDER A DISPROPORTIONATE BURDEN OF CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK, WITH LITTLE RECOGNITION OR COMPENSATION. This renders many less likely to work for income, escape poverty, accumulate savings, get an education, participate in politics, or have time for rest and self-care. Under these conditions, gender equality will not be achieved. UN Women has been at the forefront of a global call to start measuring and valuing what women do.

For most countries, a major barrier to action, besides the assumption that women should be the default providers of unpaid care, has been a perception of high cost. Extending services to provide more childcare or time-saving access to water or electricity seems like another pressure on often scarce resources. Through UN Women’s work, however, there is an emerging body of compelling evidence showing that these investments, while substantial, also bring significant returns.

A growing number of countries are turning to UN Women to perform a cost-benefit analysis of unpaid care as part of making choices about public services and economic policies. In the REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, the Government is committed to planning future investments in early childhood education and care services, recognizing that for years these have been inadequate and, in rural areas, unavailable. The issue had become a burning concern, taken up by gender advocates, civil society groups and academia.

A team of experts from UN Women began to crunch the numbers on the costs of expanding these services and the potential economic impacts. The study found that while there would be a large upfront investment of around 3.2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) annually, new jobs would be created. This would boost overall employment by 4 per cent and women’s employment by 6.2 per cent. Increased tax revenue and social security contributions would deliver a 5.8 per cent rise in GDP. The bottom line; public investment in free universal childcare would be self-funding and not require a tax hike. A typical mother of two benefiting from 11 years of free childcare would ‘repay’ the original investment after 7 and 14 years of full-time employment on average earnings.

A similar initiative in KYRGYZSTAN recently provided the country’s first evidence for scaling up government investment in early childhood education and care. It has helped policymakers understand public spending on social care infrastructure as a strategic and smart use of resources that will fuel a stronger economy and the achievement of multiple SDGs.