Women’s Economic Empowerment
Citizen Survey Report

#WomensEconomicEmpowerment

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Final report & recommendations for the High-Level Panel
In January 2016, the UN Secretary-General launched the High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment, created to provide thought leadership and mobilize concrete actions aimed at closing economic gender gaps that persist around the world, therefore contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The High-Level Panel committed to launching a report and action plan by the September 2016 UN General Assembly (UNGA) meeting. This report harnessed the best ideas and insights collected during the current evidence gathering and global consultation period to put forward an ambitious vision which will motivate and persuade global decision makers to create a cohesive strategy for implementing the targets and goals around women’s economic empowerment in Agenda 2030. Throughout this journey, there was a requirement to engage with organizations, NGOs, the rural and urban poor, young people and civil society so they are part of a conversation that builds momentum, buzz and political will for this ambitious agenda for women’s economic empowerment.

The creation of this citizen survey instrument at http://empowerwomen.myworld2030.org was to help meet this challenge and to engage people all over the world, especially women, to better understand their subjective experiences and views about priority areas needing attention to ensure women’s full economic inclusion and empowerment. The findings of the citizen survey were shared with the High-Level Panel for their consideration in the run up to UNGA 2016. This final report draws on the correlations between the citizen survey findings and the report published by the HLP in September 2016.

**Women’s Economic Empowerment Citizen Survey**

This bespoke survey edition was designed by the UN SDG Action Campaign and U-report working with the High-Level Panel Secretariat and the UK Department for International Development. The questions address key barriers to progress as well as the principal enabling factors of women’s economic empowerment, and attempt to gauge satisfaction levels with the government response thus far.

The survey was distributed via two modalities; online, to the MY World community through a series of email distribution networks and a social media campaign, including a global voting day which resulted in millions of impressions and votes collected from 174 countries and secondly through an SMS outreach campaign through the U-Report distribution network in 15 countries in the global south. Across both mediums we were able to collect 165,000 responses (mostly through SMS), however most of the below analysis has been carried out only on 140,000 SMS responses as additional numbers came in from Nigeria after the deadline for this report and the online survey sample was too small in each individual country to meet our criteria. Ten countries had more than one thousand respondents, the cut-off point we have chosen for using individual country examples in this report. The profile of respondents indicates that the majority of the online respondents were female (80.5%), the majority of overall respondents were between the ages of 21 and 40 and were educated beyond the secondary level (87.5% of the respondents) as can be seen in Tables 1,2 and 3 respectively. Detailed aggregated information was not available for mobile respondents, however the majority were young people from the global south, under the age of 35.

This paper presents the results from the two survey questions that generated the most interesting results, to inform the discussion of the panel with inputs from both men and women.
Key citizen survey results

The female labour force participation rate—the most commonly used measure of women’s participation in formal work—does not count the unpaid household and care services that women perform. This unpaid work often includes growing food for their families and taking care not just of children but also the elderly in their families. The Panel’s investigation findings echoed that of the survey in showing that unpaid household and care work constrain and shape women’s decisions to participate in the labour. The survey posed the question:

Which of the following are the biggest barriers for women to get a good job, earn more money or start a business?

The citizen survey figures in response show that for most people it was clearly family responsibilities that posed the main barriers to women’s increased engagement in paid work, with fear of violence second overall and traditional views of women third. Very few people felt that lack of digital connectivity was a barrier for women, and one in ten respondents cited lack of skills, with even fewer mentioned legal barriers to women working.

Figure 1 – Percentage of mobile respondents across all countries who reported barriers for women to getting a good job, earning more money or starting a business

The country breakdown among the first two barriers demonstrates significant differences. While a majority of respondents in Mexico felt that traditional views of women were a barrier to their economic empowerment, less than a third of respondents in the other countries where the survey was conducted chose this option. In Liberia, less than ten per cent of respondents felt that traditional views of women were the problem.
By contrast, family responsibilities were cited as a barrier by between 40 and 55% of respondents in six countries, in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. **Interestingly in Mexico, the country with the lowest proportion of respondents choosing family responsibilities as one of the factors holding women back, women spend on average ten weeks more than men on unpaid care work per year, one of the highest proportions in the world.** It is possible that people are seeing family responsibilities as part of a larger problem of gender norms when they consider their responses to this question, or that large government-supported childcare schemes which aim to support poor women’s labour force participation in Mexico such as the *Estancias* programme have led respondents to see family responsibilities as less of a barrier in Mexico.  

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1 For further discussion, see Hunt, A. and Samman, E. 2016. 'Women’s economic empowerment: Navigating enablers and constraints'. London: Overseas Development Institute.
The survey’s finding corroborates the finding – echoed in the Panel’s report – that not all of women’s work is recognized as productive or part of mainstream economic measures of GDP or GNI. Estimates of the value of unpaid care work done by women however, reveal the value to be at least US$10 trillion, or 13 percent of global GDP.²

The Panel’s investigation confirmed that of the seven drivers identified in their research large and persistent gender gaps in unpaid work and care are a major driver of gender differences in labour force participation rates, in part-time or full-time work, in occupational choices, in informal or formal work, in leadership positions, in earnings and in entrepreneurship. In cases where men and women enter the labour force at similar rates, women are more likely to take on part-time work or to exit the paid labour market once they have children.

The Panel found these constraints to be especially severe for women from poor households, who lack access to or cannot afford market substitutes for their unpaid labour. For example, more than half of women aged 20 to 24 in a Latin American stated unpaid responsibilities at home to be the main reason they could not look for paid work.³ Women’s unpaid work imposes the heaviest burden on the poorest populations: In Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria and Uganda, “women living in poverty carry heavier workloads than men, across both rural and urban communities.”⁴

However, as incomes rise, many women in both developing and developed countries may decide to allocate more of their time both to unpaid work and care for their families and to volunteering. But because most women (like most men) follow gender norms and stereotypes, it may be difficult to distinguish norms from preferences in how men and women share unpaid work and care.

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⁴ Levot, R. 2016. Men, Gender, and Inequality in Unpaid Care. Promundo, UNHLP Background Brief.
responsibilities. The focus on norms was clear in the overwhelming impression from the data in which respondents identified gender norms, and their implications for domestic responsibilities, as a key barrier identified to women’s economic empowerment. These patterns were roughly consistent when the data for each country was broken down by gender and by age. In this regard, the Panel had identified adverse social norms as an overarching constraint that faced women and shaped gender gaps in all types of work. Social norms were the focus of one of the Panel’s stakeholder engagement meetings that took place in South Africa and focused on informal workers. The Panel noted that restrictive norms are those that require a woman to spend most of her life within her home such as in some communities in South Asia and West Asia, where a woman seen in public brings “shame” to the family. Such norms in turn limit the aspirations of women about which occupations they should pursue, the prospects they have for leadership and restricts their entrepreneurship.

Adverse gender norms in turn interact with laws and regulations in ways that further constrain women’s economic independence. An overview of discriminatory norms emerges from looking at the OECD’s Social Institutions & Gender Index, which is a measure of discrimination against girls and women (and includes formal and informal laws, social norms across 160 countries).5 The Middle East and North Africa region performs worst, with serious weakness in civil liberties and the family code. The weak protection in law offered to women was highlighted in the survey in connection to the threat of violence women face. Globally, respondents stated that the second barrier to economic opportunities for women (after family responsibility) was ‘fear of violence’. In two countries: Pakistan and Liberia, more than one in five respondents chose this option. In Mexico and Ukraine, less than one in ten selected this as an obstacle to women’s economic empowerment.

The report by the Panel highlights that while a majority of governments now prohibit violence against women, consistent with their international obligations, 46 economies do not legislate against domestic violence, 41 do not legislate against sexual harassment, and 59 do not legislate against sexual harassment in employment6. In the Middle East and North Africa, around four in five countries still do not have legislation on domestic violence and laws on sexual harassment in employment.

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5 The 2014 edition of the Social Institutions & Gender Index covers 108 countries, and 104 of them are UN member countries. The
The survey asks about barriers and also about what help is needed to allow women to participate more in the economy through the

**Question: Overall, which of the following would best help women to get a good job, earn more money or start a business?**

While fear of violence and family responsibilities are the main barrier chosen in the survey, the most commonly chosen action to help women was education. This corresponds with new analysis of the Gallup World Poll survey, which similarly confirms that on average across 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in 2011 96% believe that girls and boys should have equal access to good education.\(^7\) Having women role models was cited as the second most important action overall with twelve per cent of respondents selecting it. Five countries: Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Cameroon and Guinea had ‘female role models’ as their second option. Interestingly, the investigation by the Panel identified that role models could play a significant role in affecting the norms around education. A randomized experiment in India found that exposure to female leaders eliminated the gender gap in education and reduced the gender gap in aspirations by 20 percent in parents and 32 percent in adolescents.\(^8\)

The Panel has urged that tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models should be at the top of the 2030 Agenda to expand women’s economic opportunities. Some of the most effective strategies for positive norm change involve working with children and adolescents, both boys and girls, to break entrenched and discriminatory norms passed down across generations. Notable examples highlighted in the Panel report have included:

- The Gender Equity Movement in Schools programme— which encourages both boys and girls adopt more gender-equitable norms through role-playing games, interactive

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\(^7\) Ibid.

extracurricular activities, and lessons on gender-based violence, marriage and sharing household tasks—has had positive results.

- In Ethiopia and Kenya, a Youth-to-Youth Club Initiative aimed at building life skills and self-esteem helped female youth gain income-earning opportunities and increased men’s acceptance of women’s leadership.9
- In Uganda, information about higher profits in traditionally male-dominated sectors helped women entrepreneurs cross over into those sectors.10 Although vocational training aimed at encouraging women to enter male-dominated industries has produced mixed results, disseminating information to women about higher returns in such industries has worked.11 In Kenya, women who received information on the pay differential between traditionally male and female professions were 5 percent more likely to pursue male-dominated careers.12

Despite the fact that family responsibilities were the most common barrier selected, more help with maternity pay and childcare was only chosen as an action by just under ten per cent of respondents worldwide, as was family planning. Access to women’s groups and banking were seen as less important with less than six per cent of all respondents choosing them. Family planning, maternity pay and childcare, and access to banking, came second in two countries each. In Mexico and Burkina Faso more than one in five women chose access to banking as a key action, while in all other countries less than five per cent of respondents chose this option. Again, the responses followed a similar pattern when broken down by gender and by age.

**Figure 5** – Percentage of respondents that chose government actions which would help women to get good jobs, earn more money or start a business

![Percentage of Respondents](https://ureport.in/polls/)

Source data from: [https://ureport.in/polls/](https://ureport.in/polls/)

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Key Conclusions

Although the Panel reviewed evidence on impact, cost, effectiveness and scalability, when assessing interventions evidence is not comprehensive due to a lack of data, small sample sizes, time lags in assessing impact, and scarcity of resources for measuring results. However, the data generated within the MY World & U-Report survey goes some way to plugging the wider data gap acknowledged in the report by capturing the views of those experiencing such barriers to inform strategies to overcome them. Apart from measures to deal with increasing educational opportunities for women and hence increasing their access to the labour market, the Panel report identifies steps that can be undertaken to remove barriers identified in the survey i.e. the unpaid work that women do and the fear of violence.

To remove the barrier posed by unpaid work, the Panel has suggested

- Reducing unpaid care through infrastructure investment and access to time- and labour-saving technologies
- Access to affordable high-quality childcare and pre-primary services and education for children especially in developing countries and for poor families in high-income countries
- Opening and changing the dialogue on gender roles in care can facilitate the redistribution of care responsibilities at home
- Paid family leave policies are another important form of support for childcare with broader beneficial effects.

To address the barrier posed by violence, the Panel discussions highlighted measures that

- Focus on increasing women and girl’s economic empowerment such as skills training and cash transfers and thus in the process reducing the risk of violence by improving her financial autonomy and bargaining power
- Engaging men and boys to promote positive norms around gender equality as well as to build awareness against sexual harassment at the workplace and thus helping to prevent backlash at the household or community level
- Corporate action to prevent and respond to violence such as awareness training in the workplace and an improved enabling environment of policies and laws.
**Key Recommendations**

To ensure success, it is crucial for all those involved in the carriage of interventions to increase female economic empowerment to track the progress of indicators that measure unpaid care, violence and access to education i.e. the variable identified as important in the survey presented in this report. In doing so, monitoring processes will both give pre-eminence to issues identified by people themselves but will also be addressing the paucity of data on the success and outcomes of interventions.

There is a further recommendation that members of the High Level Panel engage in further and ongoing discussion at appropriate moments with participants in this survey, young people and citizens at large in order to gather a deeper understanding directly from those living with the challenges of unpaid care, violence and limited access to education. One such opportunity could be for the UN SDG Action Campaign & U-report to facilitate an online dialogue with young people and citizens in January 2017. We could then add additional observations, conclusions and commitments to the report based on that conversation. A further dialogue can be facilitated with civil society actors via the World We Want Platform.
**COUNTRY / REGIONAL APPENDIX**

**Box 1: Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa**

The largest number of respondents in any one country came from Nigeria, with over 113,000 people taking the survey. Because a number of results came after the deadline, only 95,000 are included in the aggregate figures, but the results very much tally with the global pattern, with family responsibilities as the biggest barrier chosen, by 40% of respondents, and fear of violence and traditional views with 20% and 17% respectively. As in other countries, a good education was the overwhelming choice for government actions, with 57% of people choosing this option, and no other choice getting more than 15% of respondents.

**Figure 6 – Barriers for women to get a good job, earn more money or start a business in Nigeria**

![Figure 6](https://ureport.in/polls/)

**Figure 7 – Government actions, which would help women to get a good job, earn more money or start a business in Nigeria**

![Figure 7](https://ureport.in/polls/)
Other responses from Sub-Saharan Africa conformed to this pattern, with notable exceptions being the large number of respondents in Liberia (24%) who chose lack of skills as a key barrier, and the large number in Burkina Faso (23%) choosing access to banking services as a priority action, which would benefit women.

African respondents, with the exception of those in Burkina Faso and Liberia, were also more likely than others to cite the importance of female role models in helping women to get good jobs and earn money. While education was by some degree the most common option selected, female role models were second in a number of countries (e.g. Nigeria with 13% of respondents selecting this option, or Zimbabwe with 15%).

**Figure 8 – Percentage of respondents that chose women role models as a method of helping women get good jobs and earn money**

Source: https://ureport.in/polls/
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www.WomensEconomicEmpowerment.org

View the survey at:
http://empowerwomen.myworld2030.org

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