

THE STOCKHOLM FORUM ON GENDER EQUALITY

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (WEE) THROUGH TRADE, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

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OVERVIEW

Increasing women's participation in the economy means more jobs and more economic autonomy. When women have their own incomes, their status and bargaining power in the family increases.

Trade has increased job opportunities for women in a significant way. At the same time women still participate less in international trade because they face numerous challenges and obstacles.

Women remain under-represented as entrepreneurs. Fostering entrepreneurship is therefore a key policy goal for governments that are convinced that high rates of entrepreneurial activity will bring sustained job creation.

Digital technologies have a vast potential to improve many aspects of people's work and life. Today, nearly half of the world's population is connected to networks. However, this unprecedented growth in connectivity is not equally enjoyed by everyone. Women are particularly disadvantaged.

KEY TAKEWAYS

Where are we?

OECD report points at gaps in access to technology for women, especially in developing countries. In addition, according to the PISA study report girls have less confidence in every discipline and are less happy about their studies – not only in the technological sciences.

Out of 4.5million students in Iran, about 54 per cent are women – a trend that lays a positive foundation for women empowerment.

Structural barriers in the form of different myths about where to invest money make it almost impossible for women to access finance in certain areas.

What are we doing?

Governments are now recognising that we have a gender equality problem. 'OECD recommendations on gender were the same in 1980.' Numbers reveal a lot about the barriers that women face, reducing their possibility to contribute to the economy. Almost all girls in OECD countries have higher education degrees. Clear progress in employment and in rebalancing the burden of non-paid work for women have been made. The number of female entrepreneurs is too low.

Mexico has introduced a programme for girls that mentor them in the ICT area.

Iran has initiated a scheme for women that will facilitate access to loans and training for women with focus on female entrepreneurship – both in villages and urban areas. A network and training for women in IT and ICT has also been established. Women in Iran use the network for training, education and marketing products.

Empowering women to stand up against domestic violence and abuse is also economic empowerment. The national platform 'Great Women' is working towards gender-sensitising local governments, educating them, and giving women access to technology and leadership. During the second phase women entrepreneurs have access to mentorship and support. Established women business networks also advocate for members take part in policy consultancies with the government.

Targeting government support to the public sector works better. Examples include the Aid for Trade project (a trade-related development assistance project) where 14 women led silk production enterprises in Cambodia that received capacity building, access to international markets that doubled their profits. There were similar results for coconut growers in Samoa. Support to women-led mango growers in Africa led to standardisation, quality assurance and export to France and Belgium.

It's important to use data to understand how people and women live their lives. Through digitalisation, electronic wallets can secure finance so that women are able to set aside money for cases of emergency, health insurances, et cetera. It's also important to support women entrepreneurs in getting investors so that women get better access to finance. When success cases are showcased, other investors will be attracted to reach out to, and collaborate with, women entrepreneurs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Where do we go from here?

We need to develop an updated global standard available for women entrepreneurs all over the world. The Swedish government is investigating the possibility to support projects by ITC and SIS relating to such a standard.

Governments can work towards the liberation of the tech market and close the technological gap by making products more affordable. Investing in women in tech give the biggest returns. Sweden will soon be short of 60,000 tech specialists. We have to encourage women to enter those male-dominated professions.

The business sector is lagging the public sector when it comes to women representation. There's an urgent need to focus on the business sector in order to change this trend. In the Forbes 500 for entrepreneurs, women representation is only five per cent and the representation of women in ICT businesses is also too low. We need to work on targeted policies for women in business to accomplish change.

We need to emphasise the network building and establish a business registry with gender-aggregated data.

We need to connect women entrepreneurs directly to the market; take a holistic view and engage in the environment; put focus on the importance of data – with gender-aggregated information; offer access to finance from women's perspectives; and build effective networks. ■

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