

# A ROADMAP FOR PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

## — HIGHLIGHTS —



## RESEARCH COMMISSIONS

This report would not have been possible without the contributions of the research partners and authors of the research commissions, listed below.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Improving the Productivity and Earnings of Women-Owned and/or Managed Enterprises in Developing Countries: What Works?

Christopher Woodruff and David McKenzie

Capital, Skills and the Economic Lives of the Poor: Recent Evidence from Field Experiments

Oriana Bandiera, Robin Burgess, Selim Gulesci, Imran Rasul and Munshi Sulaiman

Subsistence, Transformational and Something in Between

Elisa Gamberoni, Rachel Heath and Emily Nix

The Benefits of Women's Business Networks

Vital Voices Global Partnership

Women Who Save: A Comparative Analysis of Ecuador, Ghana and Karnataka, India

Cheryl Doss, Carmen Diana Deere, Abena D. Oduro and Hema Swaminathan

Financial Services for Low-Income Women: Opportunities for Economic Empowerment?

Rekha Mehra, Payal Patel, Adithi Shetty and Anne Golla

Breaking the Metal Ceiling: Female Entrepreneurs Who Succeed in Male-Dominated Sectors in Uganda

Francisco Campos, Markus Goldstein, Laura McGorman, Ana Maria Munoz Boudet and Obert Pimhidzai

### FARMING

A Meta-Analysis of Land Rights and Women's Economic Well-Being

Yana Rodgers and Nidhiya Menon

Land Rights and Economic Security for Women in Vietnam

Nidhiya Menon, Yana Rodgers and Alexis Kennedy

Good and Efficient? Women's Voice in Agriculture

Ralitza Dimova and Ira N. Gang

You Can't Eat Cotton: Evidence on Crop Portfolios and Gender from Benin

Markus Goldstein, Karim M'chich, Joao Montalvao, Ana Maria Munoz Boudet, Michael O'Sullivan and Beth Zikronah Rosen

Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture: Supporting Women Farmers

Cheryl Doss, Zoe Bockius-Suwyn and Shereen D'Souza

Closing the Gender Asset Gap: Learning from Value Chain Development in Africa and Asia

Agnes R. Quisumbing, Deborah Rubin, Cristina Manfre, Elizabeth Waithanji, Mara van den Bold, Deanna Olney and Ruth Meinzen-Dick

Increasing the Productivity and Earnings of Rural Women: What Works?

James C. Knowles

### WAGE EMPLOYMENT

How to Improve Women's Employability and Quality of Work in Developing and Transition Economies

Petra Todd

Case Studies and Best Practice Research on Empowering Women through Clean Cookstoves Projects in Bangladesh

Nepal Chandra Dey

### YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Identifying Research Gaps and Priorities for Women's Economic Empowerment: Gender and Youth Employment

Elizabeth Katz

### SPECIAL COLLABORATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

Mapping Demand for Women's Economic Empowerment Projects: A Global Analysis of UN Women's Fund for Gender Equality Proposals

UN Foundation and UN Women Fund for Gender Equality



## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

When women are economically empowered, entire communities benefit. Jobs increase women's earnings, help boost their self-esteem and bargaining power at home, and delay early marriage and pregnancy. When women earn, society as a whole benefits, through increased investments in children's schooling and health, reduced poverty for all, and enhanced aspirations for the next generation of girls and women.<sup>1</sup> Yet until now, a crucial knowledge gap on the most effective interventions has slowed our collective ability to advance women's economic opportunities.

To address this gap, the UN Foundation and the Exxon-Mobil Foundation joined forces to develop *A Roadmap for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment*. The report identifies proven, promising and high-potential interventions that increase women's productivity and earnings in different economic and country contexts.

Among the 1.6 billion workers worldwide receiving regular wages in the labor market, female workers, on average, are paid significantly less than men.<sup>2</sup> Women are also over-represented among microentrepreneurs and small farmers, doing low-productivity, low-paid or unpaid work in firms and on farms. This disparity in productivity and earnings is not because women are less capable entrepreneurs, farmers or wage workers. Rather, it is because women's lower educational levels and limited access to resources and inputs means that they work in smaller businesses and farms, and in less well-paid sectors of the economy.<sup>3</sup>

This report examines which interventions work to empower women economically. Whether an intervention works depends on the situation of the woman, and the context in which she lives. Three main questions guided this research:

1. **What works:** Which economic empowerment interventions are proven, promising or high-potential, based on the evidence from rigorous policy and program evaluations?
2. **For whom:** For specific categories of women likely to be working for pay or seeking work, which interventions are most effective?
3. **Where:** How do typical country scenarios influence the success of interventions?

## THE RESEARCH COMMISSIONS AND DATABASE

The report summarizes the findings of 18 research studies commissioned across four categories: entrepreneurship, farming, wage employment and young women's employment. Some conducted new data analysis, while others reviewed existing evidence. On the basis of these commissioned review studies, the project compiled a database of 136 published empirical evaluations of programs and policies.

## THE RESULTS

The report systematically analyzed this evidence to identify whether interventions led to an increase in women's productivity and earnings. It also looked at the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of the programs, where this information was available.

The report's overview draws on the results of the commissioned studies and the database of evaluations to build the Roadmap for Action and derive Key Lessons Learned.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons derived from the research have been grouped into four main categories: *Entrepreneurship*, *Farming*, *Wage Employment* and *Young Women's Employment*. The first three categories cover main sectors of employment and economic opportunities for women and men. Young women's employment is included as a fourth, cross-cutting category because of the unique job challenges confronting young women, especially in poor countries and households.

1 World Development Report 2012

2 World Development Report 2013

3 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2011; World Development Report, 2012

## LESSONS

The list that follows shows the major lessons learned from the empirical evidence for the four major categories of interventions. These lessons provided the basis for the recommendations made in the Roadmap for Action:



### ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Capital alone, as a small loan or a grant, is not enough to grow women-owned subsistence-level firms.
- A relatively large capital transfer, if paired with income generation training and follow-up technical visits, can transform occupational choices of very poor women, and can be cost-effective.
- Capital alone can work if it is delivered in-kind (e.g., inventory) to more successful women microentrepreneurs with larger-sized businesses. In-kind capital seems to nudge women to keep the money invested in their businesses.
- Financial services delivered through mobile phones are less costly and may be more effective than other delivery mechanisms in increasing women's business investments.
- Business training improves business practices but has few measurable effects on the growth of women-owned subsistence-level firms.
- The impact of business training may be improved by increasing the quality and duration of the training, combining training with customized technical visits or expert advice to the firm, and targeting women running larger sized firms.
- Savings interventions increase women's business earnings. Women seek savings vehicles, and use personal savings to invest in their businesses.

### FARMING

- Formal ownership and control over farmland improves women's productivity and economic security. But the success of land tenure interventions depends on paying attention to social and local contexts.
- Farmer groups and collectives can provide individual women producers with access to markets and help overcome constraints in meeting demands of agricultural supply chains.
- An integrated suite of services, which target both production and marketing and address social constraints, is the main feature of agricultural projects that succeed in raising the productivity of small-scale women farmers.
- Single agricultural services, rather than a full suite, may be enough to increase productivity of women with larger sized farms, more assets, and more control over those assets.

### FARMERS AND RURAL ENTREPRENEURS

- Access to electricity increases rural women's productivity and earnings. Access can be increased by providing targeted loans or subsidies for connection costs to existing grids.
- Mobile phones help increase earnings of women farmers and rural entrepreneurs by providing access to market information.
- Female autonomy is an important determinant of rural women's earnings and influences the success of interventions targeting women farmers and rural entrepreneurs.



### WAGE EMPLOYMENT

- Skills training, job search assistance, internships and wage subsidies introduced to cope with economic shocks increase employment levels of adult women, but do not raise wages.
- Access to childcare increases women's wage employment levels and earnings, but design and delivery matter to ensure quality, affordable and cost-effective care.



### YOUNG WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

- Demand-oriented skills training, combined with on-the-job training and wage subsidies, increase young women's employability and earnings, if social restrictions against hiring young women are not binding.
- Cash grants to young women, conditional on them attending school, increase their attendance and may improve educational outcomes. Cash grants with no conditions may increase young women's employment and income and have sizeable social benefits.
- Livelihood programs that combine reproductive health education with income and asset-building show promising results for young women, especially in low-income, socially conservative settings.

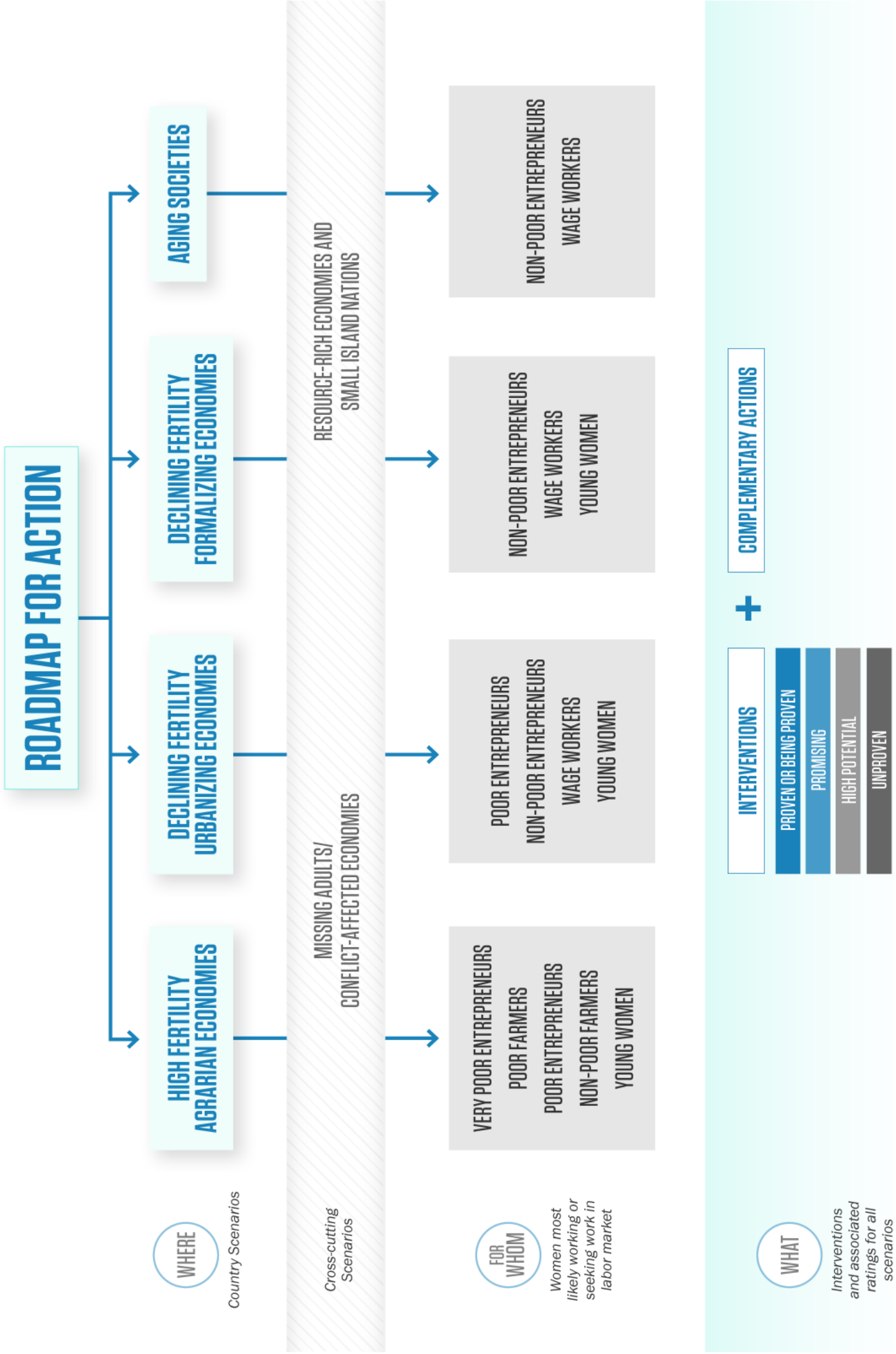


# THE ROADMAP FOR ACTION

The Roadmap for Action was developed primarily to guide actions and investments by the private sector and through public-private sector partnerships. The Roadmap *favors actions that directly and in the short-term seek to empower women economically.*

Based on the strength of the empirical evidence, the Roadmap identifies nine proven, nine promising, and six high-potential interventions to increase women's productivity and earnings in developing countries.

TABLE 2: WHAT WORKS FOR WHOM AND WHERE





# ROADMAP FOR ACTION

## HIGH FERTILITY AGRARIAN ECONOMIES

Lower per capita resources for investment in human capital and growth  
 High fertility, including among adolescents  
 Large youth populations with low schooling levels  
 High maternal mortality rates, particularly among mothers under age 15  
 Inadequate infrastructure and services for rural majority

Poorer health and lifetime earnings for women and children, greater household vulnerability to poverty  
 Majority works in agriculture and off-farm work linked to agriculture  
 Women overrepresented in low productivity, subsistence agriculture and subsistence level firms  
 Women face severe time constraints



## DECLINING FERTILITY URBANIZING ECONOMIES

Potential for rapid economic growth in near future  
 Early stages of fertility decline and rising share of working-age population  
 Poor maternal health and high adolescent fertility

Jobs mostly in informal sector  
 Potential shortage of infrastructure and services, especially for poor  
 Jobs in light-manufacturing expand in countries integrated into global markets which provide opportunities for women

VERY POOR ENTREPRENEURS	POOR FARMERS	POOR ENTREPRENEURS	NON-POOR FARMERS	YOUNG
Microsavings Bundled services Rural electrification	Microsavings Land rights/land titling Rural electrification	Microsavings Bundled services Rural electrification	Savings Land rights/land titling Credit	Microsavings Rural electrification Demand-driven job services Conditional cash transfers
Mobile phones Suite of services for farming Farmer associations Information on land rights	Mobile phones Modern agricultural inputs Farmer associations Information on land rights	Mobile phones In-kind capital Consulting	Mobile phones Farmer associations Information on land rights	Mobile phones Unconditional cash transfers Livelihood programs
Farmer field schools	Farmer field schools	Business networks	Farmer field schools	Mentors, role models
Micro cash loan or grant alone Business training alone	Micro cash loan or grant alone	Micro cash loan or grant alone	Micro cash loan or grant alone	

INTERVENTIONS

PROVEN OR BEING PROVEN

PROMISING

HIGH POTENTIAL

UNPROVEN

POOR ENTREPRENEURS	NON-POOR ENTREPRENEURS	WAGE WORKERS	YOUNG
Microsavings Bundled services	Savings Credit Business training	Savings Child care	Microsavings Demand-driven job services Conditional cash transfers
Mobile phones In-kind capital Consulting	Mobile phones Consulting		Mobile phones Livelihood programs Unconditional cash transfers
Business networks	Business networks	Firm certification Non-traditionally female skills training	Mentors, role models Information on jobs
Micro cash loan or grant alone			

### COMPLEMENTARY ACTIONS

Family planning and basic reproductive health information and services  
 Investments in schooling that increase education quality for all and reduce gender gaps in school enrollment and completion

### COMPLEMENTARY ACTIONS

Family planning and basic reproductive health information and services, particularly targeted at youth  
 Investments in secondary schooling and education quality



# ROADMAP FOR ACTION

## DECLINING FERTILITY FORMALIZING ECONOMIES

Potential for rapid economic growth  
 Rise in per capita income due to declining fertility and large share of workers in population  
 Large urban populations  
 Divide between modern, urban formal sector and prevalence of informal employment  
 Women overrepresented in informal employment  
 Increased number of workers motivated to save and invest



## AGING SOCIETIES

Strained public and private resources for support  
 Rapid fertility decline, graying populations and shrinking pool of working-age young adults  
 Added resource strains, since women live longer and have fewer economic resources  
 Increasing disability rates of older workers, reducing savings rates and increasing elderly care expenditures  
 Females more likely to take up demands of caring for elderly, increasing their time constraints

NON-POOR ENTREPRENEURS	WAGE WORKERS	YOUNG
Savings Credit Business training Child care	Savings Child care	Savings Demand-driven job services
Mobile phones Consulting	Mobile phones Child care	Mobile phones Child care
Business networks	Firm certification Non-traditionally female skills training	Mentors, role models Information on jobs
	Job training or wage subsidies for unemployed	

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**COMPLEMENTARY ACTIONS**  
 Family planning and basic reproductive health information services, particularly targeted at youth  
 Investments in secondary and post-secondary schooling and education quality

NON-POOR ENTREPRENEURS	WAGE WORKERS
Savings Credit Business training Child care	Savings Child care
Consulting	
Business networks	Firm certification Non-traditionally female skills training
	Job training or wage subsidies for unemployed

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**COMPLEMENTARY ACTIONS**  
 Safety net and pension options for vulnerable elders, targeted to elderly women

INTERVENTIONS

PROVEN OR BEING PROVEN

PROMISING

HIGH POTENTIAL

UNPROVEN

# ROADMAP FOR ACTION

## CROSS-CUTTING COUNTRY SCENARIOS

### MISSING ADULTS/CONFLICT-AFFECTED ECONOMIES

Lower potential for economic growth, households more vulnerable to poverty  
 If men missing (due to war), more vulnerability to poverty for female-headed households; women need to earn money due to high household dependency ratios  
 Male labor shortages  
 Limited infrastructure

Limited access to markets  
 Costly land  
 Absence of private sector investment  
 Low education levels due to missed years during war  
 Depleted household assets



### RESOURCE-RICH ECONOMIES AND SMALL ISLAND NATIONS

Little job creation outside of natural resources sector  
 Restricted employment opportunities for women and other excluded groups  
 Limited access to markets

Costly land  
 Limited infrastructure outside of booming enclaves linked to natural resources extraction

IN ADDITION TO THE LIST OF INTERVENTIONS UNDER THE SPECIFIC COUNTRY SCENARIO, INTERVENTIONS THAT WILL MOST LIKELY WORK IN POST-CONFLICT COUNTRIES INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Value chain projects that connect farmers and entrepreneurs to new or restored markets
- Infrastructure projects paired with income-generating opportunities for women
- Women's business associations that contribute to rebuilding the private sector
- Interventions that take advantage of new economic spaces for women opened by missing men



### COMPLEMENTARY ACTIONS

- Family planning and basic reproductive health information and services
- Investment in schooling, including accelerated learning programs and targeted programs to improve the school-to-work transition and skill deficits of young women
- Interventions to address gender issues in conflict prevention (including gender sensitive Disarmament, Demobilization, and Rehabilitation programs, and programs to address the consequences of and prevent sexual and gender-based violence)

### INTERVENTIONS

- Identify and develop domestic and niche export markets that can be accessible to women producers
- Ensure that women-owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and commercial farmers have access to productive resources (capital, technologies and land) so they can profitably operate outside the natural resources sector
- Strengthen women's autonomy through clever project design

IN RESOURCE-RICH ECONOMIES AND SMALL ISLAND NATIONS, REGARDLESS OF THE SPECIFIC COUNTRY SCENARIO, INTERVENTIONS WILL MOST LIKELY WORK IF THEY DO THE FOLLOWING:

## CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

**The Very Poor Need More:** The evidence consistently indicates that ‘for whom’ matters when assessing what works to promote women’s economic empowerment. For instance, very poor women, whether working in rural or urban settings, need a more intensive package of services than less poor women to increase their productivity and earnings. These interventions are expensive but can be cost effective, meaning benefits exceed the comparatively high initial investment.

**Clever Design Adjustments Increase Effectiveness:** These are simple design features that allow women to overcome family and social pressures, as well as mobility constraints that impede them from increasing their earnings in poorer and/or more socially conservative settings. Many of these design features give women a measure of autonomy in an otherwise restrictive environment where they are not free to make work-related choices or travel alone.

Perhaps most notable among them is replacing credit officers and other service providers with mobile phones to access financial services, conduct financial transactions in private, receive reminders to save, and obtain information on prices and jobs in real time.

A second simple and relatively inexpensive design adaptation is providing capital in-kind (e.g., refrigerator or sewing machine) to nudge women to keep the capital

in the business and avoid the pressure women face to divert it to other family members or household needs.

Finally, offering programs with location in mind – closer to women’s homes or places where women normally gather – can increase participation rates, particularly in societies where women are secluded or face mobility constraints.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

This report provides rigorous evidence on what works to empower women economically and represents a step forward in closing the knowledge gap in this field. Additional research on the costs, benefits and sustainability of interventions is warranted to continue to strengthen the evidence base. Research is also needed on the characteristics and trajectories of success among working women, so that programs can identify and recruit those more ready to succeed. Finally, more research focused on better understanding women’s preferences and constraints should lead to programs better designed to meet their needs.

By expanding and sharing knowledge of what is most effective, funders, implementing organizations and policymakers will be better equipped to achieve greater impact for women, and the benefits for families and communities made possible by women’s economic participation and empowerment.

## ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

In 2012, the UN Foundation and the ExxonMobil Foundation initiated a collaborative effort to identify investments that promote women’s economic advancement. The joint initiative builds on the shared interests and expertise of the UN Foundation and the ExxonMobil Foundation, both of which have long prioritized the empowerment of women as a means of promoting economic and social development. Their findings informed this “roadmap” that gives funders, NGOs and governments a path to the most effective programs that can help women improve their incomes and productivity.

For more than a decade, the UN Foundation has helped the United Nations address the rights and needs of women and girls. The UN Foundation works with the UN, civil society, governments and the private sector to promote gender equality, advance reproductive and maternal health, empower adolescent girls and eliminate gender-based violence.

The ExxonMobil Foundation is the primary philanthropic arm of the Exxon Mobil Corporation. Globally, ExxonMobil and the ExxonMobil Foundation provide funding to improve basic education, promote women as catalysts for development, and combat malaria and other infectious diseases in developing countries. The \$1.5 million grant awarded to the UN Foundation for this research is part of more than \$60 million invested by ExxonMobil and the ExxonMobil Foundation in the past eight years to support the economic advancement of women.

[WWW.WOMENECONROADMAP.ORG](http://WWW.WOMENECONROADMAP.ORG)



**ExxonMobil**

A photograph of a young woman with her hair pulled back, smiling warmly. She is wearing a patterned, short-sleeved top and a necklace. She is holding a large, shallow, light-colored bowl filled with several round, slightly flattened breads. The background is a plain, light color.

**MAYRA BUVINIĆ, REBECCA FURST-NICHOLS AND EMILY COUREY PRYOR<sup>1</sup>**

- <sup>1</sup> Mayra Buvinić is Senior Fellow; Rebecca Furst-Nichols is Senior Associate; and Emily Courey Pryor is Senior Director, all at the United Nations Foundation. Mayra Buvinić and Rebecca Furst-Nichols wrote the overview. The findings and recommendations in the overview are those of these authors, and do not reflect the opinions of the individual authors of the 18 commissioned research studies, nor of the UN Foundation, the ExxonMobil Foundation or other organizations that participated in this initiative.