



A Path to Empowerment: The role of corporations in supporting women’s economic progress

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In March 2014, at the International Women’s Day Forum at the United Nations, the Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative at Harvard Kennedy School (CSRI) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Corporate Citizenship Center (CCC) made a joint commitment to convene a series of roundtable dialogues to explore the role of corporations in supporting women’s economic empowerment. Each invitation-only roundtable was comprised of 15 to 20 leaders from major multinational corporations currently engaged in or interested in women’s economic empowerment as a business case and/or a social venture. The companies spanned

industry sectors and their participants represented various functional areas within their organizations. Expert presenters who are practitioners and thought-leaders in the field of women’s empowerment joined each session to provide further insight and to challenge the group to identify ways that each company, alone or in partnership, could most effectively engage. Use of the Chatham House rule enabled candid dialogue, with the aim of facilitating shared learning and establishing or strengthening relationships and specific partnerships. The content of the roundtables informed this framing report.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP ON WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The obstacles to women’s economic empowerment are complex and challenging, but they are not insurmountable. Governments, inter-governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations clearly have a key responsibility in overcoming them. But what can multinational companies do to advance

women’s economic empowerment, especially in developing countries where the positive impacts are likely to be substantial? The following framework for corporate leadership is relevant for almost any company or industry sector and is explored in more detail in the report.¹

1 ENGAGE more strategically and directly with women in core business operations and corporate value chains, as direct employees, business partners and individual contributors.

2 ENABLE women and girls to build their human capital, economic assets and leadership capacity through the support of corporate community investment and philanthropy programs.

3 ADVOCATE for women’s rights and opportunities through evidence-based corporate research, communications and public policy platforms.

1. This framework of the leadership role that business can play through its core business activities and value chains, its community investment and philanthropy, and its engagement in policy dialogue draws on previous reports by Jane Nelson, including *Business as Partners in Development: Creating Wealth for Countries, Companies and Communities* (1996), with the World Bank, UNDP and International Business Leaders Forum, and an article she wrote for GE in 2014 focused on women’s economic empowerment: <http://www.ideaslaboratory.com/post/93343738483/giving-women-a-seat-at-the-economic-table>



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CONTENTS

The contents of the report, outlined below, are based on the company programs, partnerships and ecosystems that were discussed at the five roundtables held during 2014 and 2015. Each section includes a brief overview of the challenges and business case, as well as good practice examples. The report draws specifically on examples of companies that participated or were profiled in the roundtables, and is not intended to be an exhaustive academic study or survey of corporate activities to support women's economic empowerment more broadly. It is hoped that the frameworks developed and the good practices identified during the roundtables will be helpful for other companies and their partners in government, business and civil society.

COMPANY PROFILES

Abbott | Accenture | Amway | ANN INC. | Asda | Bank of America | Bright Horizons | Chevron | The Coca-Cola Company | Credit Suisse | Dell | ExxonMobil | EY | GE | Gap Inc. | Goldman Sachs | IBM | Intel | L&T Insurance | L'Oréal | Microsoft | Rio Tinto | Kate Spade & Company | Marriott | Merck | Nestlé | Nike | Pearson | Pfizer | Qualcomm | SABMiller | Sodexo | Tupperware Brands Corporation | Unilever | Walmart | West Elm | XacBank

PART I: The Role of Corporations: Engaging, Enabling and Advocating

The introduction outlines the framework for corporate leadership that was used as the basis for framing the roundtable discussions and summarizes an 'Agenda for Action' for other companies focusing on women's economic empowerment.

PART II: Engaging Women in Core Business Operations and Value Chains

Companies have a vested core business interest in the success of their employees, suppliers, distributors, and retailers. Their potential to achieve scale and impact is particularly high if they have a global value chain. This section examines how companies may engage more effectively with three specific groups of women: 1) their direct employees, both professional and hourly; 2) entrepreneurs who own enterprises that serve as suppliers, distributors or retailers for the company; and 3) women who act as "individual contributors," such as artisans, farmers, and factory workers within the supply chain.

Finance and Technology as Catalytic Tools

In almost every roundtable, two catalytic tools were emphasized as being essential for women to succeed—finance and technology. Women have dynamic finance

needs throughout their lives. Savings, credit, and insurance are all critical at some point, and women must have personal financial literacy, access to financial programs and services that fit their needs, and the ability to spend or save confidentially. Technology has a similarly transformative power. It helps to eliminate limits, empower through conveying information and education, improve efficiencies to streamline work and simplify home tasks, and act as an engine for economic growth. Yet many women lack access to both tools, to the detriment of more inclusive and sustainable prosperity for all. Access to finance and technology are cross-cutting themes throughout the report.

PART III: Enabling Women Through Corporate Community Investment and Philanthropy

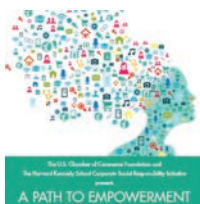
Companies seeking to economically empower women can look beyond their core business activities and value chains to harness their philanthropic and community investment programs. This section outlines how such programs can help improve women's potential as community leaders, entrepreneurs or consumers through interventions that include leadership training and networking, education and skills training, and health, safety, and wellness programs.

PART IV: Advocating for Women through Corporate Research, Communications, and Policy Dialogue

By measuring, evaluating, publicizing and advocating for women's economic empowerment, companies can help sustain the impact of their core business and social investment activities as well as influence others to take action. Conducting research and evaluations, either directly or in partnership with other companies, academia, or NGOs, contributes to the data necessary to create and implement effective public policy and business strategies. Using corporate communications platforms to reach decision-makers, corporate peers and consumers alike can amplify the message exponentially. And engaging in policy dialogue with governments and multilateral organizations helps to build trust and the cross-sector collaboration critical to effective global funding and programming.

PART V: Conclusion and Recommendations

The report concludes with an 'Agenda for Action', which offers companies, acting individually or in partnership with others, some key recommendations for ways forward on the global path to women's economic empowerment.



All the roundtable participants are listed in the full report. In addition to the leaders from companies who so openly shared their challenges, opportunities and lessons, we would like to thank the expert presenters who joined us from the following organizations and who added such valuable perspectives: **Catalyst | CARE | International Finance Corporation | TechnoServe | UN Foundation | UN Women | USAID | Vital Voices | WEConnect | Women's World Banking | World Bank | World Economic Forum**

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<http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/path-empowerment-role-corporations-supporting-women-s-economic-progress>
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