

The Gender Gap

Two years ago the United Nations set an impressive array of targets aimed at banishing gender equality globally by 2030. Recent research reveals shocking data about how far we are from achieving those goals and highlights the economic benefits that could be unleashed if the targets were met

by Mark Rowe
Cartograms by Benjamin Hennig



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ell into the second decade of the 21st century some of the great prejudices of humanity are still alive and still kicking. They include not only racism and homophobia, but the prejudice that affects half of humanity – gender inequality. As Nikki van der Gaag, Director of Women's Rights & Gender Justice at Oxfam GB puts it: 'Gender inequality is the oldest inequality there is. Gender equality is a basic human right, you shouldn't be discriminated against on gender any more than you should on sexuality or race.'

The good news is that global commitment to the human right of gender equality has never been stronger. In 2015, the United Nations made the elimination of inequality of women by 2030 one of its key goals, the first time in history such a concrete deadline had been set. In another move designed to improve matters by providing benchmarks, the UN this October launched a global index of gender equality, drawing on 153 countries, using the three key indicators of inclusion, justice and security.

MONEY TALKS

Economically, gender equality is a no-brainer: it leads to higher income per capita, faster economic growth and stronger national competitiveness. While the link between gender equality and development was always understood as self-evident, several UN reports now empirically show the strong relationship between a country's human development and its level of gender inequality. Research by the consultants McKinsey suggests that achieving gender equality would add \$12trillion to global growth.

'Ten years ago some feminists and progressives would say the link was there but others would say it wasn't true, that there wasn't the hard data to support it,' says Dr Jeni Klugman, co-author of *Leave No-One Behind*, a report commissioned by the UN's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. 'We have better data and evidence now.'

Women's economic empowerment yields human development gains, enabling greater autonomy and choice for women and boosting investment in children. Increasing the share of household income controlled by women has shown that it tends to increase spending on children's education and health. In terms of benefits for the economy, lower levels of gender inequality are associated with gains in terms of income, economic growth and national competitiveness. At the other end of the spectrum, the cost of domestic violence has been put at more than \$4.4trillion or 5.2 per cent of global GDP, according to the Copenhagen Consensus Center.

'There is also a human development argument,' says van der Gaag. 'If you ignore up to 50 per cent of

the world's population it will have a huge affect on society. You lose the skills, expertise and knowledge of millions of people.'

According to the African Development Bank (AfDB), eliminating gender inequality and empowering women on that continent could raise the productive potential of one billion Africans. 'Empowering women economically is not only the right thing to do to honour the world's commitment to human rights – it is also the smart thing to do for development, economic growth and business,' says Klugman. 'The economic and human development costs of gender gaps are enormous, as are the potential gains from closing them.'

SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS

Just as there is an increasing amount of data to show the benefits of gender equality, there is also no shortage of reporting illustrating the shocking current state of affairs. In many parts of the developing world women are effectively second-class citizens when it comes to health, education, child marriage, sexual consent, employment and political representation. They work

Women in Afghanistan

■ One of the most extreme examples of the repression of women's rights in recent decades has been the regime imposed by the Taliban in Afghanistan. In the 15 years since the fall of the Taliban, matters have improved for many women, but the picture is far from perfect and the emergent push for change much more nuanced.

Obvious gains include improvements to infant and maternal health, mental health and access to education. 'It's not so easy to quantify but there is a kind of confidence in women in the urban centres,' says Dr Wimpelmann of the University of Bergen. 'There's still scope for improvement but just moving around, keeping a job, until a few years ago that was considered much more inappropriate. There are women in the arts, media, politics.'

Yet deep-seated attitudes remain widespread. 'There's still a big stigma for women to live by themselves and most are economically dependent on their families to survive,' says Wimpelmann. 'Women can know their rights, but if they don't have the means to realise them it doesn't help.'

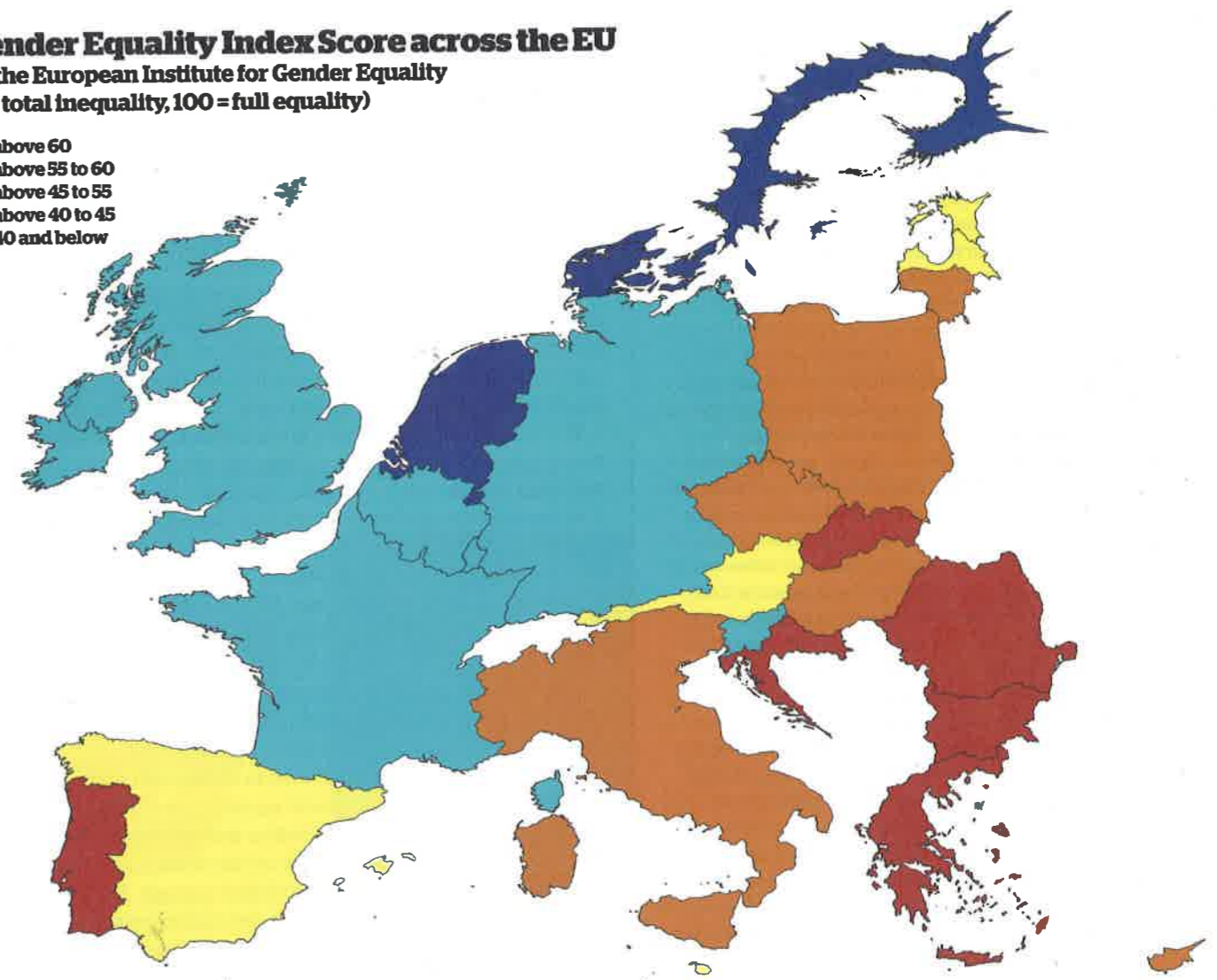
A lot of Muslim countries are much more progressive when it comes to women's rights. 'In Iran, women have much more mobility in public spaces, they can sit on benches and simply rest or chat,' says Wimpelmann. 'In Afghanistan, an unaccompanied woman at leisure in a public space is typically seen as someone inviting all kinds of immorality.'

'The main issue is security, it's difficult to achieve any kind of political change when security is so bad,' she continues. 'People get intimidated, there's a conflation between women's rights and "infidel" aid projects. A peace settlement in the region would change everything.'

Gender Equality Index Score across the EU

by the European Institute for Gender Equality
(1 = total inequality, 100 = full equality)

■ above 60
■ above 55 to 60
■ above 45 to 55
■ above 40 to 45
■ 40 and below



longer for less pay, carry out more unpaid work than men and are more vulnerable to climate change.

The World Economic Forum has said at current rates of improvement it would take 170 years for women to enjoy the same rates of pay and work opportunities as men.

Discriminatory social norms and practices, including early marriage and the gendered division of household labour, continue to limit girls' access to education. In 21 countries, girls still go to school for fewer than five years while only eight of the 32 lowest-income countries have achieved gender parity in secondary enrolment.

A review of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, published this summer gathered data from 2005 to 2016. It found that in 87 countries surveyed, 19 per cent of women between 15 and 49 years of age had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. One in three girls aged 15 to 19 in 30 surveyed nations have been subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM).

'What has shocked me is that violence against women hasn't improved in my mother's lifetime, let alone mine,' says van der Gaag.

UN data also shows that in 45 countries – 43 in developing regions – 52 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 in a relationship make their own decisions about sexual consent and contraceptives (the median value in European countries is 71 per cent). In 37 countries, perpetrators of

rape are exempted from prosecution if they are married to – or subsequently marry – the victim.

Child marriage, meanwhile, is closely linked to childbirth among adolescents and a consequent loss of opportunities for education and employment; self-evidently, reducing the adolescent birth rate is seen as integral to the health and well-being of adolescent girls and their social and economic prospects.

The average time women spend on unpaid domestic and care work is almost triple that of men. According to data collected by Klugman, only one in two women globally aged 15 and over is in paid employment compared with about three in four men.

The picture is actually getting worse and global rates of female labour force participation have fallen in recent decades from 58 per cent in 1990 to 54 per cent in 2013. More widely, the World Economic Forum's 2016 Gender Gap report concluded that gender equality has now settled back to 2008 levels.

In developing nations, even when women are paid, their jobs tend to reflect gender stereotypes and are characterised by relatively low earnings, poor working conditions and limited career-advancement opportunities. In the majority of 67 countries surveyed by the UN, fewer than a third of senior- and middle-management positions are held by women.

Women also lag behind men as entrepreneurs and are

less likely to own small or medium-sized enterprises: only 20 per cent of firms in the poorest countries have female owners. In most African countries, even though female self-employment rates are high, access to credit is harder for women than it is for men: in Kenya, despite owning 48 per cent of micro and small enterprises, women access only seven per cent of credit.

MAKING GAINS

This summer the UN reported on progress made since the SDGs were announced in 2015. Despite the negative data, there have still been gains. More than 90 per cent of girls worldwide now complete primary school, compared with only 75 per cent in 1990 – and more girls than ever are making the transition to secondary school. In 1980, the global gender gap in years of schooling among adults aged 15 years and above was 19 per cent (and as high as 57 per cent in South Asia). By 2010, this narrowed to 11 per cent. In much of the world (110 of 161 countries), more women than men are graduating from college and university.

Other improvements include marked declines in maternal mortality and corresponding increases in skilled care during delivery. Female genital mutilation/cutting has declined by 24 per cent since around 2000, when one in two girls aged 15 to 19 in 30 surveyed countries said they had undergone the procedure (the UN, however, says rates remain high in several countries). Globally, adolescent childbearing declined by 21 per cent between 2000 and 2015. Central and southern Asia made the greatest progress, reducing the adolescent birth rate by more than 50 per cent. In southern Asia, the proportion of girls married before the age of 15 declined by 44 per cent.

Political representation is also improving with much of the positive news emanating from Africa. Women hold one-third of the seats in parliaments in 11 African countries, more than in Europe. Rwanda was the first (and at the time of writing remains the only) country where more than half of parliamentarians are female. Namibia is one of few countries to use gender-neutral language in its constitution.

In 2015, the AfDB launched a Gender Equality Index for Africa based on factors such as household and legal rights and access to reproductive health services. The index ranges from 0 to 100, with 100 representing perfect gender equality. Just ten countries out of 52 managed to score 65 or above (South Africa was the highest, at 74.5; Somalia the lowest at 15.8). The mean average score was 54.1 (see previous page for a similar map showing EU levels of gender equality).

Such gains still fall short of changing the status quo, however. Without gender equality developing countries cannot hope to pull themselves out of poverty, but the link is still often disputed or ignored. 'Countries have seen real income growth and expanding access to education and legal protection,' says Klugman, 'but there is still deep-rooted discrimination and injustice. We see persistent gaps when it comes to norms, particularly in countries where discrimination is more extensive and explicit.'

Oxfam's van der Gaag sees deeply-rooted gender-based discrimination emerging from 'a triangle of

Gender Equality for Men

■ 'If men are part of the problem when it comes to gender equality,' says Gary Barker, CEO of Promundo a Brazilian-based NGO that promotes gender justice and rights, 'then they are also part of the solution.' For the past 20 years, first in Brazil and now in 38 countries, Promundo has actively engaged with men, seeking to address preconceived notions of masculinity and superiority and, perhaps even more frequently, social norms that are inherited and adopted unthinkingly.

'If you don't address violence, and achieve equality in sexual health, general health and caring then equality for women will never happen,' says Barker. Promundo's methods include community-wide conversations about positive fatherhood, the benefits of involved fatherhood and shared decision-making, and the costs of violence and exploitation.

The NGO looks for points of entry into discussion; these include places where norms of masculinity are produced, such as schools, or pre-natal centres where new norms can be introduced. 'Most fathers-to-be will attend at least one pre-natal session,' says Barker. 'That's where they can be introduced to new norms – the norm that they are expected to attend the sessions.'

The aim, says Barker, is to get men to understand that existing norms harm them and that gender equality benefits men too. 'There is nothing biological that makes women inferior,' he says. 'But you can turn that around and say there is nothing biologically that makes men more violent or tough. Those men that feel bound to match up to those conceptions of standards of masculinity are more likely to drink heavily, be violent to each other and come to harm. It's easy to accept norms you inherit and that are around you. But if they think critically, they see it's not good for men.'

barriers': individual attitudes and social norms of how men and women should behave; structural and institutional barriers, involving laws on the ground; and social mores at the community level. In practice these invariably translate into social norms around the types of work done by women and men; women's mobility outside the home; the value of women's work; the justification for violence against women; and women and men's rights to expect equal remuneration and respect at work and equal access to property.

'Such norms also mean that education does not always translate into better economic opportunities for women,' she says. This is particularly the case in the Middle East, North Africa and in South Asia (UN data shows that South Asia has the largest gender gap in educational achievement).

'There's overt and covert resistance [to gender equality],' says Klugman. 'There are quite major challenges to which we don't really have answers. Why do women continue to go into low-paid opportunities, why do women do three times as much unpaid work as men, why are women less likely to have their own bank account? There's no single silver bullet that will fix it. It's about norms and culture and it will take time.'

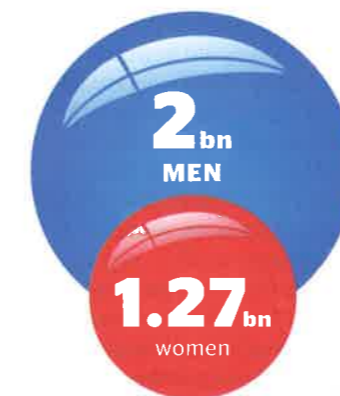
IN FIGURES...

\$12trillion

amount estimated to be added to global growth by achieving gender equality worldwide

2030

Target date set by UN to eliminate inequality of women



Across the planet, 700 million fewer women than men of working age are in paid employment in 2016 (1.27 billion women against two billion men)



\$4.4trillion

cost worldwide of domestic violence (5.2% of global GDP)

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

Pointing out the economic benefits that arise from gender equality would appear to be an obvious approach but many voices argue this risks diluting non-negotiable human rights. Dr Torunn Wimpelmann a researcher at the Chr. Michelsen Institute at the University of Bergen, Norway, is sceptical of using economic arguments to persuade those holding conservative social mores to address gender inequality. 'I'm not a big fan of saying that economic development makes the case for women's rights,' she says. 'This doesn't have to be justified in economic terms, it should be an objective in its own right. It doesn't take us anywhere to say [to opponents of women's rights] "you may not agree with it but it's important for the economy".'

However, Dr Klugman feels there is space for such an argument: 'I think we have to be pragmatic and if it requires pointing out the economic costs and benefits of gender equality then I'm fine with it. It's important to emphasise the rights-based case, but that may not take you all the way.'

Attitudes prove hardest to change: social mores and norms and patriarchal views of how men and women should behave. Klugman points to the need

for legislative frameworks and laws that are more progressive than local social norms. Role models also help: soap operas in Latin America that feature prominent wives who work have been shown over time to reduce fertility rates and boost girls' education levels.

'You have to be very culturally sensitive,' says van der Gaag. 'A lot of work recognises that this is absolutely key. It can be hard to change your mind about something, you can't do it overnight or on a six-week course. But if you start with boys and girls and their parents, you can start changing attitudes over generations.'

She has seen evidence of this during field work in the Philippines. 'Parents are saying it is hard for them to change their attitudes as this is how they have been working all their lives, but they need something different for their children. That is beginning to come through with the millennial generation.'

In Afghanistan, NGOs have done much good, says Wimpelmann, including enabling the setting up of midwifery schools and the Afghan Human Rights Commission, where women could raise concerns about forced marriages. 'There is a shift from the stigma attached to abused women who complain. Areas that were taboo are no longer so taboo,' she says.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

There's no denying that the legacy of NGOs and aid flows can be mixed. While Western agencies can often be used as leverage that enables women to avoid directly negotiating with powerful national figures or institutions, such intervention does not necessarily lead to broader social change. Some interventions and initiatives, while well-intentioned have not always worked and can come across as drop-in solutions from an NGO textbook, such as the numerous short term 'awareness-raising' training courses that could sometimes be framed in terms of indicators (for example, 200 elders trained on human rights in district 'X' or 50 women taught about their rights in village 'Y').

'In the early days [post-Taliban] there was a sense that things in Afghanistan could be changed very quickly, that you could get laws and frameworks in place,' says Wimpelmann. 'But you can't take short cuts. You can have a law, it looks nice on paper but it doesn't mean anything if it doesn't have the anchorage in society.'

Putting women's quotas in place can have limited impacts. 'There's been a big focus on women working within the security system,' she continues, 'which looks nice for the donors but what are they actually doing, are they just making tea? It's hard to assess. There's been a sense that we have to get everything quickly in place, Western embassies have tried to fast-track change and that has crowded out some local women's organisations. Many of the first post-2001 activists were already familiar with the international aid system. They'd lived in exile in Pakistan, they spoke English. There's a bit of a disconnect between the aid donors and parts of the Afghan indigenous women's movement that don't speak English.'

Local women must be listened to in order to achieve meaningful change, says van der Gaag: 'You can't just drop yourself in and impose yourself. There's a risk of not being humble enough. You need to listen to women

on the ground. What they say may be different to what you want to do.'

EFFECTIVE MEASURES

One organisation that appears to have unlocked the secret of diffusing social norms is Tostan, which is based in Senegal and works across west Africa. A community-based organisation, Tostan has enabled 20,000 women to be selected for leadership positions within their communities. Meanwhile three million people now live in communities that have publicly declared an end to FGM; and more than 7,500 communities have publicly declared that their daughters will not marry before they are 18.

'We don't do messages,' says Tostan's founder, Molly Melching. 'You can't just go in saying you have to stop child marriage or FGM. You have to be very respectful, engage the village elders, make it clear this is about the rights of men, boys and elders as well as women.'

Tostan uses facilitators fluent in the local language and of the same ethnic group as the community members. Typically each village runs two classes – one for adults and one for adolescents – that meet three times per week over the course of the program and use traditional African oral traditions such as theatre, storytelling, dance, artwork, song, and debate.

'It's a holistic approach, education is key,' says Melching. 'You're explaining the human rights they have and that in some cases the norms that have been inherited and never questioned are mistaken practices, and that they are not in line with the community's cultural or religious values. We encourage them to discuss and take action on important topics that they themselves define as critical to the future of their families and communities.'

Tostan's approach of working with men and boys to

transform harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics is widely recognised as a critical part of the solution to achieve gender equality. 'If you just work with women you don't achieve so much,' says van der Gaag, who recalls working with girls in Pakistan's Punjab and reminding herself that the boys playing cricket on the streets may be asking 'what about me?'

'If you see your dad beat up your mum you are more likely to do it yourself,' she says, 'but if the father changes his attitude, the child is more likely to be egalitarian.' Correspondingly, the World Health Organization also finds that women who witness violence against their mothers as children are more likely to experience violence from a male partner later in life.

AREAS OF EFFECT

Engaging men in care-giving is only just beginning to be recognised as an important way to advance the global gender equality agenda. 'There's a steady and growing awareness in the women rights and development field that men need to be part of the equation,' says Gary Barker, CEO of Promundo, a Brazil-based organisation that engages men and boys in promoting gender equality and preventing violence.

'When men become fathers it either reinforces traditional mores or it's a real chance for them to think about gender,' adds van der Gaag. 'When you're looking at low-hanging fruit, fatherhood is one of those places you can find it.'

Such soft skills can require the boost of laws, particularly when men push back, says Barker. 'For sure, some men take the view that some gender equality is fine, just not too much,' he acknowledges. 'That's why we need both the carrot and the stick. It's not negotiable. The carrot is that gender equality makes life better for

men, but you need the stick of laws and regulations because you can't wait around for men to say they agree.'

At the other end of the spectrum, the engagement of the multinational sector is important and corporations with long supply chains can influence how gender quality plays out at grassroots level, from sourcing textiles from women's groups; palm oil harvesting that involves women; or insisting that suppliers apply equal rights of pay and conditions in such sectors.

'It's striking how much the business sector is making the arguments around the case for gender equality and diversity,' says van der Gaag. 'If they work on their supply chains it can make a huge difference. It's not just about corporate social responsibility. It's about getting the values into the core business and not just seeing it as an add-on that makes them look good.'

ONGOING STRUGGLE

While the West can certainly help tackle gender equality it is in no position to lecture. Marital rape was not criminalised anywhere on the planet until the 1970s. In Russia, where one woman dies every 40 minutes from domestic abuse, in February this year 'moderate' violence within families was downgraded to an administrative, rather than criminal offence. Nordic countries routinely score highly on any index of gender equality, yet their rates of intimate violence – 30 per cent – are also among the world's highest. Only four states in the US, meanwhile, have parental leave policies.

'No country has fully cracked this,' says Klugman.

The wider picture of gender quality is extremely mixed: heartening in many ways, demoralising in others. 'The first mistake is to think this can all be done quickly,' says van der Gaag. She points to the rising right-wing populisms and religious fundamentalisms seen all over the world over the past 12 months that have threatened the rights women have fought for over many decades. 'There's a huge thread of misogyny, which has been fuelled by online media. On the legal front we have done pretty well, we now need to make sure all the laws that exist are applied on the ground and at grassroots level. Social media has brought trolling, but it also means women everywhere are much more aware of their rights, even if they can't all get access to them.'

Promundo's Barker sees merit in the ambition of the SDG goals to achieve gender equality by 2030. 'The current pace of change will take us far beyond the next 12 to 15 years,' he says, 'but the aspiration of change is something to get on with. We're getting there in some quarters – parity in primary education has been pretty much achieved apart from a few outliers. However, most of us would say waiting 70 to 100 years for equality would be unacceptable.'

While progress has been substantial and welcome, says Klugman, efforts have to be redoubled. 'I'm optimistic in the sense that there is much more explicit recognition of the problems than in 1990 or even 2000,' she says. 'The issue is taken much more seriously, there's more commitment, more tools and laws. I would hope we would accelerate progress because otherwise it's going to take way, way too long.' ●

Female Entrepreneurs in Africa

■ African women are highly entrepreneurial, owning a third of all businesses across Africa and as many as 62 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire. Yet while this may appear to be a positive headline, the picture is a little more mixed according to the African Development Bank (AfDB). Women entrepreneurs are more likely to run micro-enterprises in the informal sector, engaging in low-value activities that reap marginal returns. They also tend to be entrepreneurs of necessity, rather than opportunity, driven into small business by the lack of alternatives. The reality is that women are far more likely to be self-employed in the informal sector than to earn a regular wage through formal employment.

In the mainstream economic market, the picture reverts more to type. African labour markets are heavily gender-segregated, with women working primarily in low-paying occupations and only 15 per cent of formal-sector firms employing a woman as the managing director. Women's prospects of generating larger earnings are limited by many factors, including a lack of basic skills, a lack of access to financial services and the challenges of balancing business and domestic obligations. The AfDB says that more secure land rights are key to improving matters. These would deliver greater protection for women and incentives and opportunities to develop more productive agriculture. At present, formal land title tends to be vested in men at the expense of the customary usage rights that benefited women.

Ethiopia and Rwanda have both sought to address this problem by mandating that land be held jointly by spouses, greatly increasing women's land ownership and giving them greater inheritance rights and protection in the event of divorce. One study in Rwanda found that this had a major impact on investment decisions on female-run farms where women were 19 per cent more likely to invest in soil conservation and other agricultural activities.



■ Across sub-Saharan Africa fewer than one per cent of households have access to modern fuels for cooking, so women and girls spend long hours each day collecting firewood and water.

■ Women in Mozambique, rural Senegal and eastern Uganda spend up to 17 hours each week collecting water. Over a year, this can represent up to two full months of labour and undermines women's ability to engage in other activities, such as education and paid labour.

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