STATEMENT OF DEPARTMENT POLICY

The Department of State recognizes that advancing women’s economic participation globally is critical to achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives. Increasing women’s economic participation throughout their lives strengthens prospects for economic growth, and benefits families, communities, and countries. In addition, enhancing women’s economic security and inclusion is key to breaking the cycle of poverty for families and preventing financial vulnerability in older age. Providing women with equal economic opportunities to unleash their full potential throughout their lives requires an integrated set of efforts.

The Department of State, along with other U.S. government departments and agencies, is committed to increasing women’s economic empowerment by enabling women’s access to capital and finance, education and training, and business opportunities. The Department seeks to promote women’s entrepreneurship and women’s equal and safe access to employment and wages. The Department is further committed to addressing the overarching issues that impede women’s economic participation generally, including gender-based violence (GBV) and access to technology and infrastructure.

The Secretary of State’s guidance on *Promoting Gender Equality and Advancing the Status of Women and Girls* emphasizes that gender equality is a top strategic priority and that “countries that respect the rights of women are more prosperous, more stable, and more secure.” As the Department works toward achieving U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives, the Department will continue to promote the full economic, social, and political participation of women globally. Increasing women’s economic empowerment through diplomacy and development is critical to advancing women’s status and is central to the United States’ commitment to gender equality.

In this strategy, the Department of State outlines its policy objectives, guiding principles, action framework, and implementation tools to support women’s economic empowerment globally. Overseas missions and domestic offices and bureaus should consider how to employ this strategy in their efforts to support women’s economic participation and pursue gender integration across their portfolios. As Department offices, bureaus, and overseas missions implement this strategy, the Secretary’s Office of Global Women’s Issues (S/GWI) will continue to serve as a source of support and guidance for the Department and its efforts to empower women globally.
The U.S. government, including the Department of State, is committed to advancing women’s economic empowerment as an essential part of our efforts to promote both economic prosperity and gender equality. Through the Sustainable Development Goals, the international community has a broad shared understanding that secure, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth cannot happen without the full participation of women and girls in all economic activities, including education, employment, entrepreneurship, transportation and infrastructure, and access to goods and services. The goal of this strategy is to provide guidance, examples, and strategic direction for Department of State officials on how best to support women's economic participation globally. Four broad policy objectives will guide our efforts:

Promoting equal access to resources and services – Women will be empowered to participate fully in the economy only when they have equal access to key resources and services, including capital, credit, land, productive inputs, and knowledge of financial management and formal banking. This includes not only ensuring that women have equal access to such resources and services, but also that they have the skills to use them through full access to education and training.

Promoting equal access to decent work – Women must be able to participate equally, safely, and fully in the labor market by having equal access to all forms of employment with equal pay. This includes recognizing the value of women's work both in the formal and informal economies and in the agricultural sector, and encouraging women's participation and equal compensation in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

Promoting women’s entrepreneurship – Women must be empowered not only to participate in the economy, but also to steer it toward growth and sustainable development. Women entrepreneurs, including both women business-owners and business leaders, should have equal access to the skills, support, and resources necessary to launch, scale, and successfully operate their own businesses.

Addressing overarching issues that impede women’s economic participation – Several overarching issues impede women’s economic participation, including all forms of gender-based violence, such as early and forced marriage and sexual harassment; multiple forms of discrimination based on gender and race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability; access to and knowledge of technology and innovation; access to adequate and quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; and access to infrastructure such as clean water, electricity, safe and reliable transportation, and sanitation.

The Department of State will work toward achieving these policy objectives through an action framework, which includes:

Legal, regulatory, and policy reform – Discriminatory laws, regulations, policies and the lack of legal protections restrict women’s ability to access education and jobs, to expand their economic potential, to rise into leadership positions, and to contribute to the economy. The Department of State will continue to work with our partners to promote legislative and policy frameworks that increase women’s economic empowerment.

Gender-inclusive economic development – A lack of reliable, safe, affordable, and accessible infrastructure and financial services often prevents women from participating in the economy. The Department of State will continue to promote and advocate for gender integration and inclusion across economic development plans, strategies, and investments.

Individual skill and institutional capacity building – Capacity building and skill development enables women to participate in the economy, including their own businesses. The Department of State will continue to provide technical assistance and capacity building to the public sector and civil society to increase women’s economic empowerment.
A round the world, women face a wide variety of constraints that restrict their ability to participate fully in the economy over the course of their lives. Women and girls face barriers to education and training, resulting in lower rates of literacy and numeracy, that impede their ability to enter and advance in jobs across a range of industries and to attain higher-wage and high-skilled employment. Women are underrepresented in the labor force, while they are overrepresented in part-time jobs, non-wage work, and low productivity sectors. Women often face discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and they face violence in the home, at school, at work, and in the street that hinders their ability to participate fully in the economy.

Globally, women lack equal access to credit, capital, and productive resources. Furthermore, the burden of unpaid care work on women limits their ability to benefit from or take advantage of economic opportunities, including employment, rights at work, education, health, and social security. Due to unequal access to technology, women are less likely to use mobile phones and the Internet for banking, rapid transfer of funds, accessing and sharing information, and business-related communications.

Women are also more likely to face discriminatory practices and attitudes that impact economic security in later life by reducing wages earned or pensions accrued over a lifetime, including different retirement ages from men. All of these factors severely limit women’s economic productivity, increase the likelihood of poverty, and equate to an economic loss for their communities and the global economy.

Unleashing women’s economic potential and reducing gender barriers is necessary to maximize global economic growth and stability. Closing the global gender gap in labor markets, for example, could increase worldwide GDP by as much as $28 trillion in 2025. By some measures, women-owned businesses are more innovative and have greater potential for job creation than those owned by men. Further, women-owned enterprises outperform men’s across a variety of financial indicators, including trustworthiness and financial discipline.

Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns across development investments. For example, women are more likely to invest their earnings back into their families and children. In addition, unpaid care work, which falls disproportionately on women and girls, entails a hidden transfer of subsidies to the rest of the economy that goes unrecognized, imposing a systematic time-tax on women throughout their lives.

Increasing the number of women in leadership positions in all levels of government, the private sector, and labor organizations is also central to fostering economic growth, peace, and stability. Economists have found that firms with
women leaders perform better the higher the percentage of women in the workforce of the firm, suggesting that women’s leadership combined with higher rates of women employees makes strong business sense. Specifically, the study estimated that when women CEOs were assigned to firms with high rates of women employees, sales per worker increased by 14.2 percent, as opposed to only 6.7 percent overall.13

The world has undoubtedly made progress in advancing gender equality over the past several decades. More women have been elected to political office, rates of girls’ education are higher, women’s legal and constitutional rights overall have improved, and women have greater control over assets and income than in the past. Yet barriers to women’s economic participation persist around the world, including in the United States, in a myriad of ways. It is the responsibility of society as a whole—not just women—to dismantle these barriers and level the playing field of economic participation.

FOUNDATION FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Setting a foundation for this strategy, the Department of State will follow several guiding principles and build on existing and complementary efforts.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Department of State recognizes that advancing women’s economic empowerment globally is critical to achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives. The following overarching principles will guide our support for women’s economic empowerment:

- Recognition that economic inequality between men and women is related to broader gender inequality in society, voice, and agency;
- Recognition of the importance of women’s access to education and training in all fields;
- Recognition of the value of the work that women do—both paid and unpaid, in the home and in the formal and informal economies;
- Awareness of the need to increase women’s participation in higher wage areas, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, in which women are underrepresented;
- Awareness of the need to increase economic opportunities for historically marginalized groups, including women and girls living in poverty or rural areas; women and girls with disabilities; older women; tribal or indigenous women; and religious, racial, and ethnic minorities;
- Recognition of the importance of the economic empowerment of women and girls affected by conflict, including

Economic Empowerment and Preventing Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a major barrier to women’s economic participation, and Department efforts to prevent GBV and support women’s economic empowerment are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Economic growth projects should include GBV-specific components as well as indicators to track incidences of GBV, such as harassment and intimidation of women workers, and their effects on project outcomes. Coordination with legal, justice, law enforcement, education, health, and other services can catalyze positive change. Addressing underreporting by workers and underrecording by companies and law enforcement can help fill data gaps on GBV prevalence in work sites, particularly on the types of workplace GBV that are currently under-documented, such as sexual harassment and intimidation, exploitation and abuse, and labor and sex trafficking. Such programming is consistent with the strategies outlined in the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, and the INL Guide to Gender in the Criminal Justice System. The APEC Healthy Women, Healthy Economies Toolkit is another resource that guides government officials, policymakers, civil society and the private sector to work together to improve women’s economic participation through better health.
those who are stateless, internally displaced, or in migrant or refugee status by addressing their special needs and circumstances;

- Recognition of the need to increase women’s representation in senior leadership and decision-making roles across public and private sectors and in employer and worker organizations and the role of engaging men as agents of change in doing so;

- Engagement of all actors in support of women’s economic empowerment, including: women and girls; men and boys; religious, community, education, business, civil society, trade unions and professional associations; national and local government leaders; and

- Awareness that the barriers impeding women’s economic empowerment are multi-faceted, intersecting, and impact women throughout their lives and recognition that existing laws, policies, and practices that limit women’s economic participation reflect underlying social and cultural norms.

**Building on Existing Efforts**

Over the past decade, the U.S. government has taken a number of steps to advance women’s economic empowerment. These include working with our partners in multilateral fora, such as the G20, International Labor Organization (ILO), the Equal Futures Partnership, and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC); integrating women’s empowerment into critical trade and investment negotiations; and supporting innovative programs like STEM training and camps for women and girls. The Department of State’s work to increase women’s economic empowerment will build upon these efforts and will complement and reinforce existing U.S. government efforts to improve the status of women and girls and promote global stability, including:

- U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security
- U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally
- U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls
For her work to address workplace harassment of women, Sayaka received the Secretary of State’s International Women of Courage Award in 2015.

**SAYAKA**

For women in Japan, the workplace can become especially fraught during pregnancy. Sayaka Osakabe was harassed and pressured to resign from her job when she announced she and her husband were expecting. After suffering two stress-related miscarriages, she pursued legal recourse for maternity harassment, or what became known as Matahara, and founded “Matahara Net” to help others.

By the end of 2014, “matahara” had become a buzzword in Japan, sparking a national debate over how to reform the workplace to accommodate women and families. A month later, the Government of Japan announced that dismissals and demotions of pregnant women are illegal—an important step for both women and the economy in Japan.
The Department of State recognizes that its efforts to promote equal economic opportunities for women and to unleash their full potential require an integrated approach. In our efforts to achieve the policy objectives of this strategy, the Department of State will continue to support women’s economic empowerment through a three-pronged action framework: (1) legal, regulatory, and policy reform; (2) gender-inclusive economic development; and (3) institutional and individual skills and capacity building.

**ACTION FRAMEWORK**

Discriminatory laws, regulations, and policies restrict women’s ability to access jobs, to expand their economic potential, to rise into leadership positions, and to contribute to the economy. According to the World Bank *Women, Business, and the Law* report, nearly 90 percent of the economies evaluated have at least one law or regulation that actively restricts women from fully participating in the economy. These laws include prohibitions against women owning or inheriting property, discriminatory tax policies, and broader restrictions on women’s participation in public life, including limitations on driving and mobility, working outside the home, or appearing in public without a male guardian. In some cases, laws prevent women from working in particular fields, such as extractive industries or transportation, where work conditions and the use of heavy machinery are seen as inappropriate for women.

In addition, many countries impose laws that prevent women from working in the evening hours, or have differential mandatory retirement ages for women and men. An absence of laws or regulations that prohibit wage discrimination, sexual harassment in the workplace, GBV, and corruption may also disadvantage women. Where gender-sensitive laws and policies do exist, implementation and enforcement are often lacking or weak. Many workplace policies, such as limited or non-existent sick, maternity, paternity, and family leave policies further limit women’s ability to advance in their jobs.
**Promising Practices and Potential Actions**

The public and private sectors and civil society are actively working to identify country-specific priority areas for legal and policy reforms. Examples of promising practices and potential actions include:

- The World Bank, through its Gender Innovation Lab, is providing incentives to countries in Africa to conduct countrywide diagnostics on specific gender-sensitive reforms that would have the greatest impact.

- The Gender in the Economy indicator—one of 20 indicators used by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in compact development and implementation—specifically measures a government’s commitment to promoting gender equality by providing women and men with the same legal ability to interact with the public and private sectors. This is one of the indicators determining eligibility for MCC assistance, and serves as an important impetus for country-specific reforms.

- Through the G20, in partnership with interagency actors, the Department worked with members to commit to narrow the labor participation gender gap by 25 percent by the year 2025.

- Under gender memoranda of understanding (MOUs), the United States is working with Pakistan, Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil to address trade, business, and economic barriers that inhibit women entrepreneurs’ ability to participate fully in the economy.

- Many companies have pledged to abide by the Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs), which were developed by UN Women and the UN Global Compact to guide businesses on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace, and community. More companies can adopt the WEPS, and companies that have already done so can work with governments and NGOs to improve implementation.

- Employers can institute and vigorously enforce prohibitions on sexual harassment and can provide health benefits, maternity and paternity leave, and on-site child care.

- Governments can encourage women’s participation in the labor force by eliminating high tax rates on secondary earners or part-time work, or by providing tax incentives to encourage women to join the workforce.
Governments and employers can adopt policies, such as general and maternal health care, maternity, paternity, and family leave, caregiver credits toward contributory pension schemes, and subsidized child care, to promote women’s economic empowerment and address the disproportionate burden that women face as primary care givers.

**Department of State Efforts**

Through this strategy, the Department of State will continue to work with other U.S. government agencies, the U.S. Congress, international organizations and multilateral development banks, and foreign governments to promote legislative frameworks that increase women’s economic empowerment. Specifically, the Department will:

- Work with governments, the private sector, and civil society, including trade unions, to encourage policies and legislation focused on prohibiting workplace discrimination, GBV, and sexual harassment.

- Address barriers to economic participation, such as lack of child care, elder care, parental leave, and early childhood education systems.

- Collaborate with governments and other stakeholders to encourage policies and legislation that allow all workers to join trade unions and professional associations to collectively bargain so that women workers can engage directly to improve their working conditions.

- Encourage private companies to adopt formalized diversity and inclusion practices not only to increase the number of women in their workforce, but to diversify their corporate and managerial leadership.

- Partner with other U.S. government agencies and foreign counterparts to ensure that trade agreements and other policy tools address barriers that disproportionately affect women.

- Collaborate with governments and non-governmental organizations to provide training and expertise on model legislation to promote and protect the rights of women and provide training to law enforcement agencies on rigorously enforcing that legislation.

- Promote the importance of women’s representation in senior leadership and decision-making roles in all levels of public and private sector institutions and in employer and worker organizations so that women’s perspectives are incorporated into policy decisions.
When women influence economic decisions in their households, they tend to allocate more income to food, health, education, and children’s nutrition. Thus, empowering women in agriculture and helping them boost earning potential by increasing the productivity of their farms benefits not only women, but also their families and communities. Improving gender equality through agriculture leads to families that are better fed, better educated, and better equipped to make productive contributions to their economies.

In Africa, although women comprise a large share of farmers, they are often denied land ownership; access to credit and markets; productive farm inputs like fertilizers, pesticides, farming tools; and support from extension services. These restrictions on women farmers affect their productivity and limit their income. For example, research by the World Bank in six African countries found that productivity on women’s farms is significantly lower per hectare compared to farms run by men, ranging from a 13 percent difference in Uganda to a 25 percent difference in Malawi.

Closing gender gaps in agriculture could help reduce hunger and improve livelihoods for Africa’s growing population, which is expected to quadruple within the next 90 years. If women worldwide had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 percent and raise total agricultural output by 2.5–4 percent. Gains in agricultural production alone could lift 100 to 150 million people out of hunger.

To narrow the gap in access to resources, the Department of State will aim to: strengthen women’s land rights; improve women’s access to hired labor, tools, and equipment; support the development of community-based child care centers; and tailor agricultural training to women’s needs. Through social and other networks, the Department will spread agricultural knowledge, promote the cultivation of high-value and cash crops to women farmers, and help women access markets.

Examples of U.S. Efforts to Support Women in Agriculture

Feed the Future: Feed the Future, the U.S. Government’s global hunger and food security initiative, works in 19 focus countries to reduce poverty and childhood stunting. With a focus on smallholder farmers, particularly women, this whole-of-government initiative supports partner countries in developing their agriculture sectors to spur economic growth that increases incomes and reduces hunger, poverty and undernutrition. All Feed the Future activities seek to reduce gender gaps in agriculture and promote women’s increased productivity. Feed the Future works to increase women’s leadership, foster land reform policies, and increase women’s access to financial services and agricultural technologies.

Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI): In 2012, Feed the Future launched the WEAI, the first comprehensive and standardized measure to directly capture women’s empowerment and inclusion levels in the agriculture sector. Today, the WEAI is used widely by various organizations and individuals. USAID is using this tool to identify the greatest constraints women in agriculture face in certain countries and to determine whether Feed the Future programs are having the intended effects on empowerment. It has found that among women in agriculture, the greatest constraints to empowerment are access to credit, workload, and group membership.
ACTION TWO: PROMOTE GENDER-INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In both developed and developing countries, structural, physical, and financial barriers exist that prevent women from achieving their economic potential. A lack of reliable, safe, affordable, and accessible infrastructure, such as transportation, sanitation, water, technology, and electricity as well as limited access to capital and formal banking often prevents women from participating in the economy. For example, in its research on constraints adversely affecting women’s economic participation in India, the World Bank found that inadequate infrastructure affects women more than men.\(^{19}\) Transportation infrastructure and paved roads within villages are especially important for women as they face greater constraints in geographic mobility imposed by safety concerns and social norms. Limited access to social goods and services, such as education, health care facilities, or legal and financial services, also limit women’s equal access to economic opportunities. In addition, limited physical access to productive assets, such as technology and capital, further disadvantages women.

PROMISING PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Broader economic development can help address challenges to women’s economic empowerment. Addressing structural and physical impediments that impede the full economic participation of women will require that public and private sectors integrate gender across their economic development plans, investments, and strategies. To address priority areas and use limited resources most effectively, development policies and programs can optimize impact by focusing on the primary constraints women face. Incentives and adequate resources should be allocated and incorporated to ensure that Department-led development efforts are gender-inclusive. Examples of promising practices and potential actions include:

- The Ambassador’s Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in Schools Initiative (A-WASH), provides a platform for U.S. ambassadors to host outreach events in country that draw attention to the critical role of water, sanitation, and hygiene for girls in schools.

- The International Financial Corporation (IFC), Goldman Sachs, and the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) launched a $600 million global gender financial advisory services facility to work with banks on restructuring services to better support women entrepreneurs and ensure they have needed access to capital.

- The State Department partnered with the microfinance platform Kiva and the Multilateral Investment Fund, a member of the Inter-American Development Bank Group, to launch the Women’s Entrepreneurship Fund to empower women entrepreneurs globally by increasing their access to finance. The Fund provides companies, foundations, and governments with an opportunity to leverage their capital by matching, dollar-for-dollar, Kiva lenders investing in women entrepreneurs.

- The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan has supported the construction of three dormitories for women university students in Kabul, Herat, and Balkh, supplemented with academic, leadership, and computer skills training offered in the dorms, resulting in increased access to higher education, particularly for women from rural areas.

- The Central Asian Alliance on Water in Kyrgyzstan ensures that more than half of the country’s 633 water associations have a gender-balanced board.

- The Department collaborated with GSMA, an association of mobile operators and related companies, on the Connect Women initiative, which coordinates efforts to increase women’s access to mobile phones and mobile services in the developing world. Its goals include enabling an additional 150 million underserved women to own and effectively use mobile phones and their services, including mobile financial services.
**Strategy in Practice: Women in Wage Employment**

Women overwhelmingly bear the burden of unpaid care work and assume a disproportionate share of paid and unpaid household jobs. In the developing world, women make up the majority of workers in the informal sector, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and unstable earnings. Wage employment, which includes everything from jobs in factories to senior leadership, in industries such as mining, manufacturing, oil and gas, and construction, as well as services like retail, finance, communications, and business services, is a key source of decent work for women. Women are 40 percent of the global labor force, but earn less than men in similar jobs and disproportionately work in low skill, low wage jobs and industries compared to men. Women are underrepresented in senior positions within companies, international organizations, and governments.

Many laws, regulations, policies, structural and physical barriers, and deficiencies in capacity and technical knowledge limit women’s ability to access and advance in wage employment. For example, until recently, laws in the Philippines prevented women from working in the evenings, severely limiting their ability to access jobs in telecommunications or offshore call centers, which is one of the Philippines’ largest services industries. Globally, the lack of safe, reliable, affordable, and clean transportation systems in urban centers, where 60 percent of the population live, impedes women’s ability to access and rise in jobs. Unconscious bias and outright discrimination, including gendered stereotypes of older women, and women with disabilities, prevent many women from obtaining stable employment or advancing to leadership positions across a number of industries.

Unions play a significant role in women’s achievement of decent wage employment. Promoting the participation and leadership of women in trade unions or the organization of all-female trade unions enables women to engage in collective bargaining, which could result in: higher wages and better terms and conditions of employment, including a safer work environment; gender equality in the workplace; and women’s empowerment to take collective action to ensure that governmental programs for workers are implemented in a gender equitable manner.

The Department will work with governments, the private sector, labor and professional organizations, and civil society to improve laws, regulations and policies that limit women’s ability to access and rise in wage employment positions. The Department will work with trade and labor unions to ensure that women have access to decent work and that issues impacting women’s employment are addressed, including the rights of workers in the informal economy. The Department will continue to promote women’s leadership and identify opportunities to elevate women leaders in our engagements and efforts. The Department will work to ensure that an intersectional gender analysis is integrated into U.S. government resource decisions and investments in an effort to increase opportunities for women.

**Examples of U.S. Efforts to Support Women in Wage Employment**

**Better Work Program:** The United States is a major contributor to the Better Work Program, a unique partnership between the ILO and the IFC. The Better Work Program improves the lives of workers and their families by driving sector-wide, sustainable improvements in adherence to core ILO labor standards and national labor law, and promoting business competitiveness in major garment producing industries, of which women make up the vast majority of workers. As of February 2014, the program was active in approximately 900 factories in eight countries, employing approximately 900,000 workers.

**Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues:** With support from the U.S. Department of Labor, the ILO’s Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues supports awareness raising, advocacy activities and the formulation of enabling regulatory and policy frameworks to strengthen protection for child domestic workers in 12 countries.

**The Women in Science (WiSci) STEAM Camp for Girls:** The camp brings together high school girls from different countries and offers them a new opportunity to participate in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education, which can lead to employment in a fast-growing, high-paying field. The camp features hands-on experiential learning and exposes the girls to the wide array of opportunities in the STEAM fields. The formal curriculum includes training in engineering, chemistry, robotics, and coding, and demonstrates how these fields can be applied to innovations in agriculture, pressing environmental issues, transportation, healthcare and other social and sustainability challenges and opportunities. The camp is designed as a public-private partnership effort, supported by the Department of State and major private sector companies.

**Women in Non-Traditional Sectors and Jobs:** The MCC has committed $1.65 billion to power sector projects, and is promoting employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women through these investments. For example, the women’s energy entrepreneurship project in Benin aims to equip women with the skills to plan strategically, analyze local markets and manage enterprises, leveraging electricity and the sale of energy products to help increase incomes. In Indonesia, women are actively participating as energy service providers in the renewable energy project, and in supply chains through agro-commodity markets such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, sea salt, and natural dye weaving.
For her fearlessness in confronting government authorities and commitment to empowering others, Awadeya Mahmoud received the Secretary of State’s International Women of Courage Award in 2016.

**AWADEYA**

Plastic chairs line the roads of Sudan’s capital—this is where Khartoum’s “tea ladies” set up shop, selling tea and food as a way to support their families.

Unfortunately, these women often face economic obstacles in their work in the informal economy—from harassment by authorities to a lack of funding access to expand their businesses.

A tea seller herself, Awadeya Mahmoud decided to confront these challenges head on. She founded two cooperatives for other women entrepreneurs, many of whom are internally displaced by conflict in Darfur and the Two Areas. Through these groups, Awadeya has helped organize more than 8,000 women to assert their rights, engage politicians on police behavior, and use the media to draw public attention to the challenges women in the informal economy face.
**Department of State Efforts**

The Department will continue to engage and collaborate with the public and private sectors to promote and advocate for gender integration across economic development plans, strategies, and investments. Where Department of State resources are involved, the Department will:

- Ensure that the specific needs of women, based upon local expertise and experience, are addressed in the design, development, and implementation of programs.
- Invest in grants and projects that support the physical and structural needs of women and girls.
- Promote programs that support women’s financial and digital literacy to better enable their economic participation.
- Promote programs for young women, including those that increase their participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

**Action Three: Provide Institutional and Individual Skill Development and Capacity Building**

In order to address barriers to women’s economic participation, public and private sector institutions, civil society, and individuals should design, develop, and support institutional capacity building and individual education and professional skill development for women and girls across their lifetime. Governments should collect data, conduct assessments, and capture best practices to implement necessary reforms. Companies can implement initiatives that welcome, train, support, and promote women at all levels. Similarly, civil society and nonprofit organizations can advocate for programs and reforms that assist women in participating in the economy, and labor organizations can advance policies that protect women and find ways to ensure that women’s concerns are addressed in the workplace. Capacity building and skill development enables women to access financial services and start or grow businesses. Networks and mentoring programs help women connect with one another, employers, financiers, and business development resources.

**Promising Practices and Potential Actions**

Capacity building and skill development can directly address specific constraints hindering women’s economic participation. Monitoring and evaluation plans and benchmarks are necessary to ensure that efforts are effective, sustainable, and integrated into core functions. All public and private entities responsible for developing and implementing laws, policies, investments, and physical or structural reforms should receive training on how integrating gender can increase impact and effectiveness. Capacity building and skill development efforts should be gender balanced and incorporated into larger economic, investment, or business forums. Examples of promising practices and potential actions include:

- The Equal Futures Partnership provides a platform for the 28 member countries and the EU to exchange best practices and technical knowledge on advancing women’s economic and political participation in conjunction with technical assistance and data from the World Bank and UN Women.
- The U.S. government has specified annual government procurement goals for designated small businesses, including a 5 percent goal for women-owned small businesses.
- The MCC worked closely with the Indonesian government to review its government procurement process and systems, and provided technical assistance to strengthen the ability of women entrepreneurs to compete for government procurement contracts.
- Power Africa, an interagency initiative coordinated by USAID in partnership with the Department, runs the Women in African Power network, dedicated to advancing the role and representation of women in Africa’s energy sector.
- The Women’s Enterprise for Sustainability (WES) center in Tunisia, established by the Institute of International Education with Department support, is recognized as a model entrepreneurship training facility that equips
women entrepreneurs with the skills and confidence to launch their own businesses.

- The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) cooperated with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia in leading a regional training workshop in Almaty, Kazakhstan on gender mainstreaming and conflict resolution in water governance.

**DEPARTMENT OF STATE EFFORTS**

The Department of State will continue to provide technical assistance and capacity building to the public sector and civil society to increase women’s economic empowerment. Specifically, the Department will:

- Further its work with trade, commerce, labor, and industry ministries as well as non-governmental organizations to identify core areas for capacity building for women within and outside of governments.
- Collaborate with multilateral institutions, donors, and civil society to gather best practices and promote evidence based reforms and data collection.
- Continue to strengthen the capacity of local organizations to advocate for reforms and develop inclusive messaging that draws on case studies and research.
- Partner with businesses and labor groups to share best practices on integrating gender across their operations.
- Work with the public and private sectors to enhance long-term productivity through capacity building, technical assistance, and skill development to women and girls from diverse backgrounds in order to advance women’s ability to participate in the economy including through job training, vocational education, and entrepreneurship programs.
- Connect women business leaders abroad with those in the United States, as well as within countries and across regions, through networks, exchange programs, and engagement with the private sector and will provide opportunities for networking and sharing of best practices.

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*Zohra Baraka (left), a Kenyan artisan entrepreneur and chairperson for the African Women’s Entrepreneurship Program in Kenya, in Nairobi, Kenya in July 2015.*

**ZOHRA**

Zohra Baraka has owned her own artisan business in Kenya for more than 20 years. She’s made hiring other women a priority because, as she says, “in Africa, if you educate a woman, it’s for the whole family.”

Several years ago, the wife of one of her suppliers came to her and asked for an advance in his pay. Apparently he would only pay for the education of their two sons, leaving their three daughters at home and out of school. The woman wanted money so the girls could go back to school.

Instead of giving the woman an advance from her husband’s pay, Zohra hired her to be a supplier in her own right—and gave her an advance from her future wages to send her daughters to school.
Progress for women in the global economy has been greatest for women entrepreneurs, with the number of women-owned enterprises growing at a faster pace than those owned by men. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 224 million women across 67 World Bank economies are new entrepreneurs or are running established businesses.

It is more difficult for women-operated businesses to secure financing than it is for firms managed by men, resulting in an estimated annual $220-360 billion in unmet financing needs among women-operated businesses. Moreover, firms operated by women receive only a small share of private equity capital, a key resource in developing new businesses. Discriminatory legal and regulatory systems and banking practices are hurdles to women’s access to capital and assets, including land, machinery, production facilities, technology, and human resources. Often, these barriers are connected to a woman’s marital status, which can determine whether she is able to inherit land or own property in her name.20 These constraints contribute to women frequently running smaller businesses, with fewer employees and lower asset values. The barriers also result in women owning a smaller portion of formal businesses, especially in less-developed economies. As a result, women entrepreneurs represent only 38 percent of all SMEs in emerging markets. However, even when these constraints are taken into account, women entrepreneurs are as productive as their male counterparts.

The artisan sector is one area where the Department has been especially active in promoting women’s entrepreneurship. The global market for artisan goods is significant and continues to expand. It is also a sector heavily populated by women entrepreneurs. The Alliance for Artisan Enterprise is a public-private partnership between the Department of State and the Aspen Institute, and is a collaborative effort of artisan businesses, artisan support organizations, corporations, foundations, government and multilateral agencies, and individuals working to support the full potential of artisan enterprise around the world. The Alliance leverages the collective strength of its members to break down barriers commonly faced in the artisan sector.

Following the best practices of programs such as the Alliance, the Department will continue to strengthen entrepreneurial eco-systems that support women’s entrepreneurship. This includes increasing support for women to start and grow businesses; expanding access to capital, financial services, and assets such as land, technical equipment, or productive resources; expanding access to markets for goods and services; and providing opportunities to expand women’s leadership and the number of women role models for entrepreneurs. The size of businesses as well as the characteristics of different sectors will affect policy and programmatic interventions. For example, artisan enterprises often work in a cooperative model and rely on supply chains that are fragmented and difficult to access, whereas technology-based enterprises need greater start-up capital and incubation to bring their models to scale quickly. The Department will continue to encourage pioneering initiatives that support the development of networks, connect private sector partners to women entrepreneurs, raise issues that impact women’s ability to benefit from trade agreements, access global markets, and promote women’s inclusion in procurement opportunities and global value chains.

Examples of U.S. Efforts to Promote Women’s Entrepreneurship

**Women’s Entrepreneurship Networks**: The U.S. government has established regional networks to support women entrepreneurs through International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLVP) exchanges, including the African Women’s Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP) and Women’s Entrepreneurship in the Americas (WeAmericas) as well as global networks of women STEM entrepreneurs generated by the Global Innovation through Science and Technology (GIST) initiative. These activities foster cross-border linkages and commercial advancement, and exchange alumni are able to pass on knowledge and create spaces in their home countries, building associations and guilds for women’s voices and advocacy to coalesce around needed reforms. The programmatic efforts focus on improving access to skills, markets, technology, and capital. For example, in partnership with Ernst and Young, U.S. Embassies and local organizations, the Department carried out a series of four TechCamps in Latin America to introduce women entrepreneurs to low-cost technologies that could help them address challenges they faced in growing their businesses.

**Women’s Business Centers**: The U.S. government has collaborated with public and private sector partners to develop entrepreneurship and business centers focused on women. Domestically, the U.S. Small Business Administration has a network of women’s business centers assisting women entrepreneurs start and grow businesses and connect them to international markets. Internationally, the Small Business Development Centers in Latin America, the American University of Afghanistan’s International Center for Afghan Women’s Economic Development, Women’s Entrepreneurial Centers of Resources, Education, Access and Training for Economic Empowerment (WECREATE) in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, and the WES Center in Tunisia provide women with similar skill building. These centers serve as sites for training, meetings, mentoring, technology support, and some offer programming to engage men and boys and to prevent and respond to GBV.

**Trade Agreements to Increase Women’s Access to Markets**: Most women-owned businesses are small and medium-sized, so addressing barriers that impact SMEs is critical to advancing women’s businesses. Preference programs, such as the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA), enable U.S. companies to invest directly in African businesses that incorporate artisans and designers, of which many are women, into their supply chains. In addition, through its bilateral and multilateral trade discussions, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative successfully negotiated Trade and Investment Framework Agreements (TIFAs) with Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Sri Lanka to identify and remove legal and discriminatory barriers to women entrepreneurs’ ability to trade and to develop necessary capacity building and support services that enable women entrepreneurs to take advantage of trade opportunities.
IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

The Department of State will implement this strategy by leveraging the Department’s tools, including: 1) bilateral, regional, and multilateral diplomacy, 2) public diplomacy and outreach, 3) coordination with U.S. and international agencies, international institutions, civil society, trade unions, and private sector partners, 4) programming, and 5) tracking progress and building evidence. To achieve the greatest impact, interventions should include components from all five areas.

I. BILATERAL, REGIONAL, AND MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

High-level, sustained diplomatic engagement with partner governments, multilateral institutions, and regional fora on women’s economic empowerment is at the forefront of the Department of State’s efforts. The U.S. government, working with other governments, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society and labor organizations, will advocate for policy and legal reforms that protect women of all ages from violence and discrimination and advance women’s economic empowerment and build public support for these reforms. The Department will continue to promote women’s economic empowerment both by communicating directly with foreign governments and by elevating women’s voices in diplomatic settings. The Department will provide technical assistance to foreign governments and assist in the development of regional frameworks, action plans, technical exchanges, or strategies for growing and sustaining women’s labor force participation, which could include government quotas, targets, disclosure requirements, and inclusion of women as participants in bilateral and regional fora.

II. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND OUTREACH

U.S. missions use public diplomacy and outreach as primary tools to advance U.S. foreign policy priorities. Public diplomacy and outreach tools include communications and media engagement with international audiences, cultural programming, academic grants, educational exchanges, international visitor programs, and speaker programs. These efforts are critical to building support, maintaining momentum, and inspiring champions of change. They help to make the case for women’s economic empowerment and build strong constituencies. Public engagement also provides support to advocates and other members of civil society who are working to support women’s economic empowerment at the grassroots level in their countries. The Department will continue to use public diplomacy and outreach to advance women’s economic participation. The Department will also model expected behavior by promoting greater gender balance in meetings, negotiations, trade fairs, and other interactions with host country counterparts and within multilateral fora.

III. COORDINATION WITH PARTNERS

Essential to the implementation of this strategy is the coordination of the U.S. government with international organizations, civil society, and private sector partners. Coordination is critical in tackling complex entrenched issues, avoiding duplication, and leveraging limited resources. Close coordination among U.S. government agencies, foreign countries, the private sector, and civil society on the development of business platforms and international trade and economic fora, has elevated the importance of women’s economic participation. A model example of coordination among all of these entities is the gender work conducted through APEC, including through the Women and the Economy Fora, which has elevated women’s economic empowerment as a top priority among all APEC economies and private sector partners represented in the APEC Business Advisory Council. The United States has also successfully incorporated women’s economic empowerment into the 2014 Africa Leaders Summit in Washington, D.C., and several successive Global Entrepreneurship Summits.

IV. PROGRAMMING

Advancing women’s full economic participation requires comprehensive and coordinated programs by governments, civil society, and the private sector. The Department will continue to support a wide range of programming to expand women’s participation, including academic grants, International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) projects, educational exchanges, alumni programming, and small and large grants among other mechanisms. The Department supports mentoring and sponsorship programs and technical and capacity building programs for women leaders, business owners, professionals, and young girls. The Department also uses small grants to support grassroots civil society organizations working to advance women’s economic participation. The Department will continue to pursue gender equity across all programs. For example, half of the participants
in the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders and the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI), which provide leadership training to youth, have been women.

V. Tracking Progress and Building Evidence

The Department of State will continue to use, collect, and advocate for data and evidence-based policy reforms to increase women’s labor force participation and economic empowerment across their lifetime. Data 2X, launched by the Department of State and now housed at the UN Foundation, is a key gender data tool that identifies 28 global gender data gaps across five domains: health, education, economic opportunities, political participation, and human security. The Department supports enhanced collection of data (including sex- and age-disaggregated data), research, evidence-based best practices, and business case studies, which we share with governments, the private sector, and civil society. For example, the Department will work with the OECD Gender Initiative to better examine existing barriers to gender equality in education, employment, and entrepreneurship. The OECD’s Social Institutions and Gender Index provides a wide range of sex-disaggregated data and analysis of the progress made by governments to promote gender equality in both OECD and non-OECD countries and provides good practices based on analytical tools and reliable data.
ENDNOTES

6 Here, innovation is measured as “offering products that are new to some or all customers.”
20 Hindustan Times. 1 February 2016. Eldest woman member can be karta of Hindu joint family, rules Delhi HC.