

Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa

Possible Solutions from Impact Evaluations

Reducing the labor market gender gap is crucial for ensuring women's economic empowerment. Despite recording one of the highest participation rate in the workforce, women in Sub-Saharan Africa still face many institutional, economic and cultural barriers that translate into lower access to paid, formal employment and lower returns, weakening their ability to build relative stability and autonomy. Using examples mostly from sub-Saharan African countries, this document gathers evidence and lessons learned on possible solutions to overcome these barriers and effectively reduce the gender gap in the labor market. The review only focuses on evidence from scientific evaluations using experimental or quasi-experimental methods, and which allow us to quantify the causal impact of tested interventions.

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Social norms that constrain labor access and productivity for women

Women's economic opportunities and outcomes are very constrained by a range of social norms, such as the burden of domestic labor, restricted social interactions, and stereotypic gendered beliefs. Indeed, the time women spend on household care competes with the time they can devote to trainings, apprenticeships and income-generating activities (IGA), straining their productivity. This participation is also hindered by social norms that limit the interaction outside their household. Finally, strong cultural gender roles and stereotypes are often internalized by women and have large impacts on their self-confidence and competitiveness, and ultimately on their academic and career choices.

Promising solutions identified through rigorous impact evaluations around the World

Solution 1: Provide childcare services and flexible schedules

In the face of domestic burden, providing childcare services can increase women's productivity, access to training and work outside the home. Impact evaluations have shown that providing access or subsidizing childcare services increased caregivers' employment rates by about 26 % in Mozambique and 17 % in Kenya. In southern Togo, enrolling 3- to 5-year-olds in preschools made women 37 % more likely to work outside the home. In Burkina Faso, community based childcare centers allowed women caring for children under 2 to spend 20 % more time in salaried employment and observe a 50 % increase in their income from salaried work.

Similarly, a farm-school program in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda increased crop productivity and *per capita* income for female-headed households, thanks to a tailored, flexible schedule that facilitated their participation by taking into account household chores.

Solution 2: Use new technologies to promote women's training and productivity

Remote trainings using tablets, SMS or videos reduce time and travel costs of accessing information, facilitate training without the need for a male trainer's interaction, and allow for advice personalization. In Ethiopia and Uganda, short video sessions featuring farmers implementing new agricultural practices were presented to households as part of a training program on maize cultivation. An impact evaluation showed that participation increased female members' access to information by about 25 % as well as the level of information retention. In Uganda, women were then more likely to adopt the new recommended practices. In Ghana, tablet-based diagnostic and weekly-personalized advice on farming techniques increased both men and women's knowledge and adoption of farming techniques but not profits. As part of another study in Niger, adult beneficiaries received a training on improving different agricultural yields, as well as a cell phone to share with four other co-beneficiaries. The cultivation of okra, a crop mainly grown by women, particularly increased.

Solution 3: Recruit female trainers

Recruiting female trainers may also render trainings and courses accessible for women when interaction with male counterparts outside the households is not accepted. The Government of Mozambique recruited female volunteer advisors to link agricultural trainers in Sustainable Land Management (SLM) techniques with households in their communities. They were encouraged to promote and disseminate the techniques learned from the training agents in their social networks. The impact evaluation showed that women's knowledge of SLM increased by almost two-thirds from their initial level and women's adoption of SLM increased by about 50 %.

Solution 4: Offer trainings in couples

Inviting couples to agricultural trainings has also been shown to be a lever for improving women's participation in production, increasing household agricultural productivity and woman agency. In Cote d'Ivoire, 3-day training on the farming of rubber seeds were provided to farmers and their spouses as a couple: Farmers treated as a couple showed better plot management, used more labor and non-labor inputs and were 19 % more likely to have retained their action plan two years after the training. They planted twice as many trees and were able to maintain harvest and productivity levels on older trees, contrary to the individual farmers that saw a 26 % drop in harvest.

Solution 5: Correct false beliefs about returns and the perceived social norms

Correcting false beliefs about returns and perceived social norms can be a powerful lever to amend gendered stereotypes in the labor market. The choice of an industry is determined by multiple factors such as beliefs about the pay in each industry, as well as beliefs about the social norm. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women business owners in female-dominated sectors make less profit, have lower growth potential and are more frequently in informal settings compared to women in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

Two studies in Ethiopia and Uganda found that women entrepreneurs in female-dominated sectors tend to underestimate the profits made by women in male-dominated

sectors. The impact of correcting these beliefs was evaluated in the Republic of Congo as part of a skills development program. Providing real earning information and median salaries of different occupations increased the likelihood that a woman would choose training in typically male-dominated sectors such as topography and crane operating, by 28 %.

Moreover, support from male family members or social circles is a key factor in women entering and persisting in male-dominated fields. While a recent study by the AFD showed that men in Tunisia correctly estimate the social norm around women in the job market after correcting for desirability bias, a study in Saudi Arabia showed that husbands of working aged women underestimate the community's acceptance of a woman entering the job market. When informed that the majority of their male fellow citizens were actually in favor, husbands were 2.6 times more likely to allow their wives to work outside the home, and their wives were then more likely to apply for jobs.

Solution 6: Using role models to attract women to scientific fields

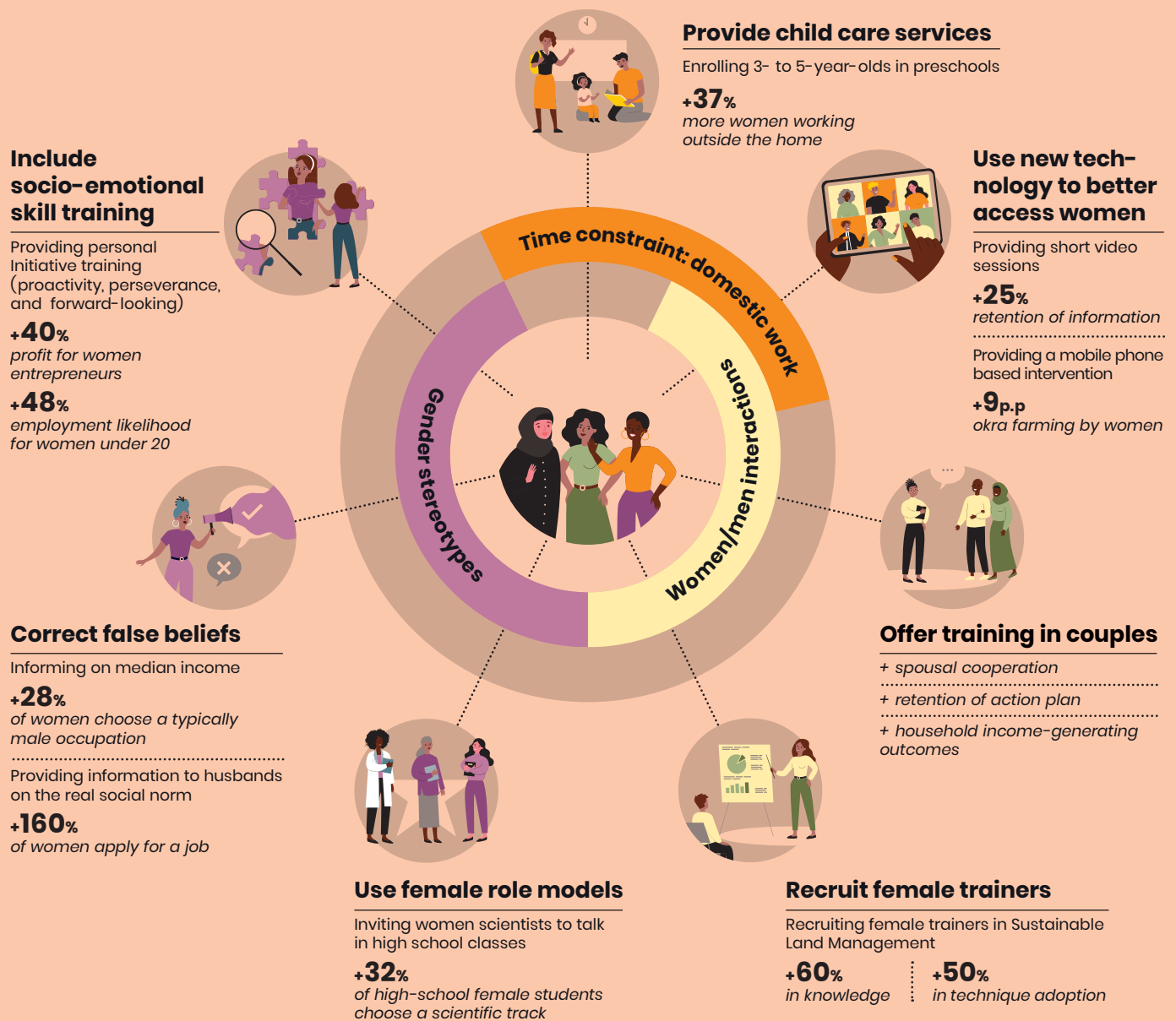
In sub-Saharan Africa, women are very little present in scientific fields, which in turn decreases their access to profitable fields. In other countries, exposing women and adolescent girls to female role models and success stories have shown promising results in encouraging women to enter scientific fields. For example, a quota reserving seats for women on village councils increased exposure to female leadership and decreased the gap in aspirations for high-skilled jobs between girls and boys by nearly one-third. In France, the *Girls in Science* program by L'Oréal provided one-hour classroom talks by young women with a science background. A rigorous evaluation of this program showed that when women scientists intervene in high school classes, it reduces stereotypes associated with scientific careers among both girls and boys, and increases the proportion of girls in the final year of high school going on to a science preparatory program.

Solution 7: Provide socio-emotional skills

Personal Initiative (PI) trainings, that target certain socio-emotional skills such as personal initiative, perseverance and problem-solving, have been successful in improving women's economic outcomes. In Togo, a training program randomly provided entrepreneurs with either standard business training or PI training. While the standard training had little impact, the PI training increased firm profit by 30 % in general, and by 40 % for women.

Two programs in Uganda and Liberia provided young women under 20 with social-emotional skills trainings, such as building self-esteem and planning skills, along with local vocational training. Both programs increased employment likelihood (+48 % after 4 years in Uganda, +30 % after 6 months in Liberia). In Uganda, the programs also improved women's self-confidence, and decreased their anxiety levels and the age at marriage and early pregnancies.

Figure 1– Social norms that constrain women’s productive labor market participation and some promising solutions



Previous experience has helped us identify some promising solutions to attenuate social norm barriers in the labor market. Nevertheless, more impact evaluations are still needed not only for validating the effectiveness of these interventions across different contexts but also for monitoring their possible unintended consequences, such as an increase in domestic violence.

For more details and references used for this brief, please refer to the full technical report here:

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Box 1 – Promote women’s access in emerging sectors, such as the digital and renewable energy sectors, where gender preferences are not yet salient

This could be done by adapting women’s training to the needs of these sectors or raising awareness among recruiters. While no project dedicated to women in the digital sector in a developing country has been rigorously evaluated, the impact evaluation of a vocational training program also open to men, organized by the World Bank’s Gender Innovation Lab in Nigeria, is encouraging: compared to the control group, 28 % more young graduates moved towards the digital sector when given ten-week trainings to meet international standards. The shift towards the digital sector is three times more pronounced for women with implicit biases against women’s professionalization (i.e. access to employment in general).

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