



The background image shows a man with a mustache wearing a striped shirt and a patterned vest, a woman in a black jacket and white scarf, and a young girl in the foreground. They are in a shop with colorful packets hanging in the background.

THE MISSING TARGET

Changing beliefs and behaviours
to deliver gender equality

TO BRING ABOUT REAL CHANGE WE MUST LOOK OUTSIDE THE WORKPLACE, AND BEYOND LAWS AND POLICIES, TO ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY – FOCUSING ON HOW AND WHERE DISCRIMINATION AND STEREOTYPING HOLD WOMEN AND GIRLS BACK.

Gender inequality is a barrier to both social cohesion and economic prosperity. Despite some progress over the years, the marked unfairness of the gap in status, pay and opportunity which defines relationships between men and women, girls and boys, continues to represent a significant fracture in our society. There has been no real shift in power which – at home, in the workplace and in public life – lies firmly in male hands. Gender equality remains elusive despite the fact that evidence shows it is good for everyone – leading to individuals and wider society being better off, better educated and healthier.¹

At both national and corporate levels, the business case for gender equality in the workplace, which results in improved productivity and economic growth, is largely accepted. The World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Report 2017*, using research from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), estimates that closing the gender gap in economic participation by 25% could increase global GDP by US\$5.3 trillion by 2025.²

- But despite this, too many questions remain unanswered:
- In many countries, including the USA, there are more female college graduates than male. **Why are more men being hired and promoted so that, inevitably, there are fewer women in positions of leadership?**
 - 75% of CEOs state that gender diversity in the workforce is a priority for them. **Why are men still being paid more than women in the same or very similar jobs?**
 - Global prosperity and collective purpose have been increasingly under pressure in 2017. **Why are we still not developing and properly including the talents of 50% of the population?**

Global efforts to tackle gender inequality have traditionally focused on improving policies and laws, and increasing the participation of girls and women in sectors like education, health and employment. Despite this the Global Gender

Gap Report 2017 found that the disparity between men and women had in fact widened across health, education, politics and economics for the first time since records began in 2006.³ Non-discriminatory laws and policies and gender parity in specific sectors are clearly not enough.

TARGET ROOT CAUSES OF DISCRIMINATION

To bring about real change we must look outside the workplace, and beyond laws and policies, to address the root causes of gender inequality – focusing on how and where discrimination and stereotyping hold women and girls back. This bias starts from birth, sometimes before, and operates in families everywhere. It continues to operate throughout life, to the detriment of mainly girls and women, in their homes, schools and communities. All over the world gender norms, which are shaped by society’s beliefs and perceptions, define what it means to be a girl, boy, woman or man, and set limits for what is considered appropriate behaviour and actions.⁴ If not tackled, the stereotyping that holds girls back and places often unrealistic expectations of being tough and strong on boys, wanting to restrict us all to a binary identity, continues down the generations. These entrenched attitudes interact with policies, laws and specific sector initiatives, and limit their effectiveness.

Ignoring gender norms or social rules that have, for generations, defined what people are allowed to be, not only hinders progress, but can create further resistance and backlash against girls and women pressing for change. It is important to recognise that the discrimination operating within society as girls and boys prepare for adult life can diminish girls’ self-confidence and restrict their ambition and self-belief. Most societies are still bringing up their girls to fulfil a primarily domestic role and this training can undermine their sense of their own capabilities. It also limits their access to the social networks and opportunities that might enable them to envision a different future as valued employees and potential leaders.⁵

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP IN ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION BY 25% COULD INCREASE GLOBAL GDP BY US\$5.3 TRILLION BY 2025.

In this paper, in order to emphasise the importance of tackling oppressive gender norms wherever they exist we examine the impact of gender inequality across three key sectors vital to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and prominent in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, to show not only the impact of these harmful beliefs and stereotypes, but how far-reaching they are across all sectors. The sectors are:

- The digital economy
- Food security and agriculture
- Education and work

Within these areas, we show how harmful attitudes, beliefs and behaviours hinder progress, and how challenging them can be effective in driving gender equality – creating a more just, and eventually, a more prosperous world.



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Digitisation and internet connectivity are driving the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and gender equality could play a pivotal role: increasing women’s use of digital tools and participation in the digital economy would advance their employment opportunities, and lead to wider economic development.⁶ If women in Europe held digital jobs at the same rate as men, Europe’s annual GDP would be boosted by an estimated €9 billion.⁷ However, harmful stereotypes about women’s abilities and roles keep them from being able to participate equally.⁸

Worldwide, women are much less likely to work in the digital sector:

- Women hold 24% of jobs in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector.⁹
- Under 40% of jobs in the telecommunications industry are held by women.¹⁰
- Most jobs held by women are at junior levels: just 11% of senior roles in the ICT sector are held by women,¹¹ and 20% in the mobile phone sector.¹²
- Fewer than one in 10 senior leaders of mobile operators in Africa are women.¹³

For women to succeed in education and employment, digital literacy is crucial. Yet the gender gap in internet use is rising: globally women are 14% less likely to own a mobile phone, and 12% less likely to be online. In Asia, the gender gap in mobile phone ownership is 38%; in Africa, women are 25% less likely to use the internet than men.¹⁴ According to a study by Accenture, at current rates of digital adoption, developed nations are unlikely to achieve workplace gender equality until 2065, which rises to 2100 for developing nations. If governments can double the pace at which women become technology users, gender equality could be achieved in the workplace by 2040 in developed nations and by 2060 in developing nations.¹⁵

Closing these gender gaps in digital literacy and the digital economy relies on challenging deeply entrenched ideas of what women can and should do. Technologies are often viewed as male-only domains.¹⁶ This perception influences the educational choices girls and young women make. In OECD countries, only 38% and 25% of science and engineering degrees respectively are held by women, which restricts their access to digital careers.¹⁷ Even if they have the qualifications, gender stereotyping, workplace discrimination and a lack of confidence in their ability to work in this male environment, prohibit women from both entering and progressing in the sector.^{18,19}

CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES

In recent years, companies, governments and organisations have launched a number of projects and campaigns to encourage girls and women to take up careers in the digital sector, primarily by challenging these harmful gender stereotypes. Such initiatives, often targeted at adolescent girls, include coding camps and projects, profiling female role models and guidance on careers in the science and technology fields. They have been shown to increase girls’ and women’s confidence, leadership skills and interest in future jobs in these areas.^{20,21,22}

Efforts in digital workplaces to shift away from a masculine culture and improve gender diversity have had some success – for example with ‘unconscious bias’ training which seeks to challenge discrimination in recruitment.²³ However, there is still some resistance. Although evidence clearly confirms that women face barriers in male-dominated industries, some men are pushing back and believe that “the line for what counted as harassment had become too easy to cross and that the push for gender parity was too extreme a goal”.²⁴ This backlash demonstrates the necessity, and the challenges, of bringing the entire workforce on board with the advantages of gender equality for men, women and the wider economy.

MOVING FORWARD

Diversity is good for business and participation in the digital economy is still too much a male domain. A greater awareness of the barriers faced by women, and the influences and gender rules that are in play long before girls choose jobs and careers, would go a long way to improving this workplace for women and increasing their use of technology in general. Encouraging young women to get the right qualifications, tackling harassment, promoting flexible hours, working from home, and scrutinising promotion and recruitment processes for gender bias would all help to create gender equality. It will take personal commitment from senior management and must extend beyond the writing of company policy into the behaviour and atmosphere prevalent in the workplace.

IF WOMEN IN EUROPE HELD DIGITAL JOBS AT THE SAME RATE AS MEN, EUROPE’S ANNUAL GDP WOULD BE BOOSTED BY AN ESTIMATED €9 BILLION

DIGITAL LEARNING CENTRES FOR GIRLS:

PLAN INTERNATIONAL INDIA AND ERICSSON COLLABORATE²⁵

Digital Learning Centres, set up by Plan International India in collaboration with Ericsson, use technology to provide quality education to 15-25-year-old girls and young women within their communities. Through ICT, girls learn English, maths and science subjects in a safe, all-female environment – as well as components of personality development, gender equality, reproductive sexual health, vocational skills and career counselling. The project also sensitises communities to the importance of girls’ education. One participant commented: “Since joining the centre I have become more confident and have been able to communicate openly with people.”

Globally, women produce 50% of the world's food but make up 60% of undernourished people.²⁶ Individually, however, women engaged in agriculture face social, cultural, legal and economic barriers to maximising production, and pay a high price in terms of their own health and rights.²⁷ Their efficiency as food producers is undermined by gender bias.

Women play a fundamental role in food production worldwide and are the primary providers for their families' nutritional needs.²⁸ Women in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, produce up to 80% of basic foodstuffs for household consumption and sale.²⁹ However, when it comes to ownership, size and quality of land, women own little and tend to work small, low-quality plots which affects their efficiency as farmers and limits their output.^{30,31} The UNFAO estimates that if women had equal access to productive resources, including the amount and quality of the land itself and the availability of credit and extension services, they could increase the yields on their farms by 20% to 30%. This in turn could produce:

- An increase in the total agricultural output in developing countries of between 2.5% to 4%.
- A decrease in the number of hungry people in the world of between 12% to 17%.³²

Access to land and malnutrition are directly linked. There is an approximate 60% increase in malnourished children in countries where women lack rights to land.³³

Cultural beliefs are a critical factor in the link between women's rights over their land and their ability to maximise its production.³⁴ Even if civil law provides women with land and inheritance rights, local custom can overrule this. A study in six South Asian countries found that even where formal laws are in place to protect women's land ownership and inheritance rights, women are still severely restricted in these areas by customs governing family and social relations.³⁵ Women are also frequently denied an education, access to technologies, freedom of movement and support for unpaid work, all of which enhance agriculture production.³⁶

Women are also more likely than men to spend what money there is on food, health and education for family members,

yet they are less likely to have direct control over the family finances.³⁷ One study in urban Brazil found that a child is 20 times more likely to survive if household finances are controlled by women.³⁸ However in many countries, discrimination and entrenched beliefs about women's roles restrict them from generating or controlling income, accessing education or working outside the home.³⁹

Despite their central role in agricultural production, in poorer countries women and girls often face "food discrimination" within their homes: only eating what is left after the men have finished, which is often not enough and of poor nutritional quality.⁴⁰

SHIFTING THE STATUS QUO

This can be countered through dialogue with family members to challenge the status quo and highlight the health needs of women, particularly during pregnancy. Such interventions have brought about positive change, for example the women, men and children of the household all eating together which means a more equal sharing out of food.⁴¹

It is vital to acknowledge the contribution of women and girls as agricultural workers and contributors to family budgets, national economic growth and the overall health of the nation. Equipping them with the appropriate resources in terms of fertile land, extension services, education, and access to loans - as well as the right to own and inherit land - would go a long way towards building the sustainable, efficient and nutritious food systems which are a global priority.

MOVING FORWARD

Funding and running agricultural services and educational outreach work for women farmers would not only increase their efficiency but would also raise their status as workers and contributors and increase their self-confidence. This visible investment, potentially from governments, corporations and NGOs, would help tackle the underlying social attitudes that view the work that women and girls do as of little value. Changing the value placed on girls and women will help promote gender equality across all levels of society.

**IN BRAZIL,
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Closing the gender gap in global employment participation and wages could increase women’s income globally by up to 76%.⁴² However, gender discrimination means that women are more likely to be excluded from education and decent paid work: in 2016 about 700 million fewer working age women than men were in paid employment.⁴³

The previous two sections of this report have analysed some of the specific challenges for women participating in the digital and agricultural economies; similar issues, which are all rooted in entrenched gender bias cut across all types of education and work.

Closing the gender gap in employment has vast economic and social benefits. Companies with a gender-diverse workforce are shown to outperform their competitors:

- 45% more likely to improve market share
- 53% higher returns on equity
- 70% more likely to report successfully capturing new markets ⁴⁴

However, despite some progress in recent years, in too many countries, girls continue to be excluded from relevant, quality education,⁴⁵ and even when they do complete school, they are significantly less likely to find paid work. Globally, a young man is 1.9 times more likely to get a job than a young woman, with the largest gap in the Middle East and Northern Africa, where young men are nearly four times more likely than their female counterparts to complete the school-to-work transition.⁴⁶

Discrimination also affects the types of jobs women do and how much they are paid; thanks to underemployment and gender wage discrimination, women are also more likely to be classed as working poor.⁴⁷ Even when legislation protects equal opportunities and equal pay, women tend to work in sectors which pay less and are less stable.^{48,49,50} Agriculture remains the most important source of employment for women in low and lower middle-income countries; in high-income countries, almost one third of women in the labour market work in the health and education sector.⁵¹ This “occupational segregation” is fed by stereotypes about suitable pursuits for men and women and those who defy these expectations work hard to overcome barriers, discrimination and stigma.⁵²

At the same time, it is often assumed that domestic and care work is the responsibility of women alone: women do an average of 75% of the world’s total unpaid care work, rising to 80%-90% in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.⁵³ Girls of all ages have more domestic responsibilities than their brothers, which eats into their time to study and limits their opportunities for future employment. Overall, the more time women spend on unpaid domestic responsibilities, the less time they spend on paid work. This unequal domestic burden comes at great financial cost to families and national economies⁵⁴ and perpetuates the stereotype of girls and women being second-class citizens.

COMPANIES WITH A GENDER-DIVERSE WORKFORCE ARE SHOWN TO OUTPERFORM THEIR COMPETITORS

It is noteworthy that, in many countries, when people were asked to agree or disagree with the statement, “when jobs are scarce men should have more right to a job”, large numbers of respondents were in agreement, ranging from 84% in India to 12% in the UK.⁵⁵ These attitudes and beliefs are significant. They correlate directly to women’s employment opportunities. Research undertaken by the OECD shows that in countries where it is generally assumed that men have more right to a job than women there are greater gender gaps in employment rates.⁵⁶

MOVING FORWARD

As more girls benefit from educational opportunities closing the gender gap in employment becomes increasingly imperative. We should not be allowing this investment in their future and ours to go to waste as a result of generations of gender bias and discrimination. This means a cultural shift at home in terms of domestic responsibilities and at work in terms of family-friendly policies, mentorships and a better understanding of how gender bias operates. It also means that men and boys must be part of the change. In 2013 The World Economic Forum *Global Gender Gap Report* stated: “It is the imperative of companies to create workplaces where the best talent can flourish. Civil society, educators and media also have a role to play in empowering women and engaging men in the process.” We are not there yet.

MATCHING SKILLS FOR WORK WITH CHANGES IN ATTITUDE

Plan International has considerable experience developing skills and savings for young people’s economic empowerment, with evidence demonstrating that such activities can reshape perceptions of youth, and change the household roles of young women. In Zambia, the Girls’ Economic Empowerment Project provided adolescent girls with entrepreneurial skills alongside training on leadership, rights and life skills, and gender awareness sensitisation through dialogue with men, women and boys and through the media. The project saw a rise in young women taking leadership positions in their community, an increased agreement from community members that girls should be included in decisions about household spending, and community-led campaigns on issues such as ending child marriage and keeping girls in school. Girls in project groups developed their own savings and investment mechanisms, and in addition to the financial and employment benefits, the groups have provided a social safety net, learning opportunities, peer counselling and support.

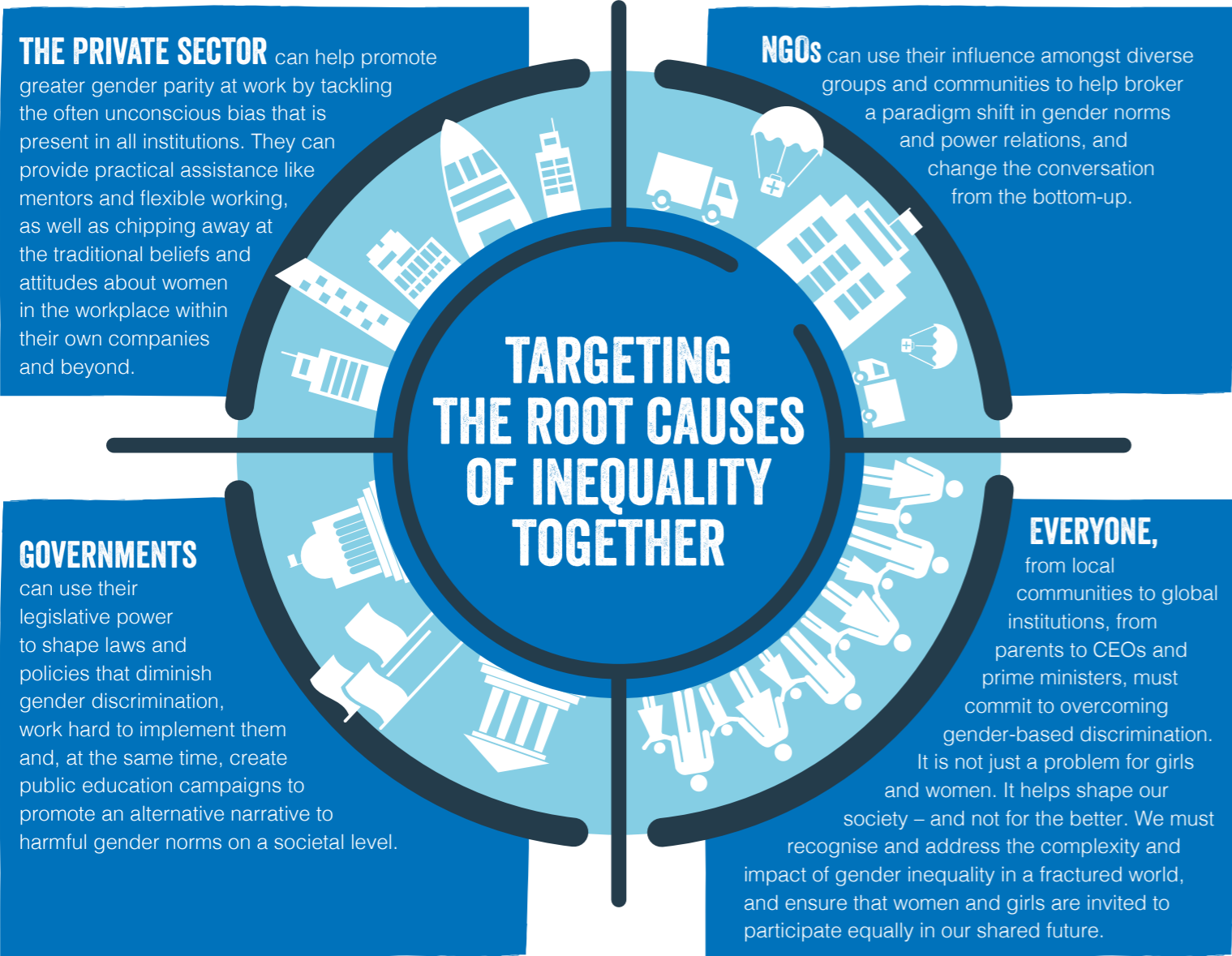
CONCLUSION: CLOSING THE GENDER GAP

This examination of three diverse, yet vital sectors for the global economy makes it very clear that entrenched gender norms are creating far-reaching fractures in our societies. Unless this fundamental gender discrimination is acknowledged and confronted it will remain impossible to improve the state of the world we live in.

The three sectors we looked at – the digital economy, food and agriculture, and education and work - all reveal that, despite recent initiatives and some progress, there are barriers to women’s participation which are not only unjust but also impede national economic growth and inhibit the economic performance of many in the business sector, putting our shared future at risk. At work this is demonstrated by lower female than male participation in the workforce, particularly at senior levels by the lack of equal pay, and, overall, by a measurable inefficiency, in terms of economic growth and productivity.

Discriminatory gender norms can be challenged, power imbalances between women and men can be changed, but they must be confronted before young women arrive in the workplace because they start at home, continue at school and pervade every area of our society. Gender equality will result in huge economic and social benefits to individuals and to society. But only if inequality is tackled, not just with laws and policies, but with a real determination to change the entrenched attitudes that have conditioned how we think, live and work for so long.

If we tackle the root causes of gender injustice we will build a more cohesive, progressive and prosperous society; if we do not the world will become increasingly fractured and unstable. We need the talents of everyone to increase the efficiency of the global systems upon which we all depend. Collaboration at all levels is key: private sector, governments and NGOs must bring their specific skills, knowledge and competencies together and work to tackle harmful gender norms in the workplace, public institutions, communities and private spaces.



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About Plan International

We strive to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

Plan International

International Headquarters
Dukes Court, Duke Street, Woking,
Surrey GU21 5BH, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 1483 755155

Fax: +44 (0) 1483 756505

E-mail: info@plan-international.org

plan-international.org

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pp.3,5: Girls learn at Digital Learning Centre in New Delhi, India. (photo credit: Plan International / Parav)

pp.3,7: Young woman showing the tomatoes she grew in her garden, Brazil. (photo credit: Plan International)

pp.3,9: Girl members of the Girls' Economic Empowerment project, Zambia. (photo credit: Plan International)

Writers: Miriam Gauer and Sophie Tanner

Editor: Sharon Goulds

Designer: Sandra Dudley

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