



# Women's Economic Empowerment. Approaches, Alliances and Strategies for Success?

## Introduction

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### Welcome and Introduction

Good morning and welcome to today's seminar. Our seminar today is entitled:

Women's Economic Empowerment: Approaches, Alliances and Strategies for Success? Hosted by Mokoro. It is great to see so many of you here, and to have such a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the room, covering research and policy as well as practice. We hope that today's event will enable some fruitful exploration and dialogue on this topic of women's economic empowerment (WEE), and that it will spark some new connections and conversations that will continue after this event.

The idea for today's seminar emerged from a dialogue between Liz Daley, Mokoro Principal consultant, and myself, earlier this year. Liz and I shared a feeling that the idea of Women's economic empowerment has gained huge traction not only in development debates but also in the corporate world and beyond - but that discourses and understandings are quite divergent, on how we understand WEE, on what strategies contribute to its realisation and how this "economic" empowerment relates to wider empowerment. And linked to this, on whether empowerment is a goal in its own right or to be understood in relation to other outcomes, be they growth, nutrition, or health. We felt it would be useful, for us, and hopefully for others too, to situate discussion of WEE in this broader context.

### Mapping the debate on women's economic empowerment

NGOs and civil society have long pursued women's empowerment and empowerment both as a goal and a process more framed in terms of enhancing the voice of marginalised people and processes around collective organising for social justice, rights, and emancipation, sometimes linked to wider processes of movement building including of the women's movement. The economic empowerment specifically of women became a major focus of debate, in the 1990s. Quite a lot of this, sometimes controversial debate, was linked to the so-called 'microfinance revolution' where development actors saw their interventions as enabling women to access finance for the first time (see e.g. Goetz, 1996; Kabeer, 2001).

More recently, bilateral as well as multilateral agencies, as well as some feminist and other economists, have focused on women's economic empowerment in terms of its relationship with broader economic development and growth: I am thinking of the work of Esther Duflo (2012), Naila Kabeer (2012) and others. The IMF has also recently taken an interest in the contribution of women to economic growth – just a few days ago, Christine Lagarde (2014) was in Japan speaking about 'unleashing the economic power and potential of women' as a means primarily to solve the economic crisis and stalled growth.

Increasingly – and necessarily - the private sector is engaged with women's economic empowerment, as we will hear, working with INGOs and donors and in its own right. For the last few years, as most of you will know, DFID has been working with the Nike Foundation on the Girl Hub which, among other strategies, "empowers girls through providing economic assets". Global corporations such as [Walmart](#) and [Coca-Cola](#) have targets for economically empowering women, and employ women's economic empowerment advisers. Business has of course a different perspective on women's economic empowerment, including seeing women as a large untapped market of consumers – referred to in a new global campaign as 'the third billion'<sup>1</sup>.

We seem some distance from the perspectives of civil society and INGOs on power and process... and yet these earlier discourses continue to inform some of our thinking and practice.... Given the profile of women's economic empowerment among international agencies, practitioners and researchers (like many of you) are required to design programmes to deliver

<sup>1</sup> "The Third Billion is the term used to represent the approximately one billion women in both developing and industrialized nations, whose economic lives have previously been stunted, underleveraged, or suppressed, and who could, over the next decade, take their place in the global economy as consumers, producers, employees and entrepreneurs." [http://www.strategyand.pwc.com/global/home/what-we-think/multimedia/video/mm-video\\_display/third-billion-ii90-2012](http://www.strategyand.pwc.com/global/home/what-we-think/multimedia/video/mm-video_display/third-billion-ii90-2012)

‘women’s economic empowerment or to devise ways to ‘measure’ this as an outcome. Some of will have attended an event at ODI in March to launch the ODI/SDD report (for DFID) Review of evaluation approaches and methods used by interventions on women and girls’ economic empowerment (Taylor and Perezniето, 2014).

Today, our primary focus is not on technical issues of measurement, although no doubt the issue will return in the discussion. We are going to step back a bit and look at the different understandings of and approaches to “women’s economic empowerment” from both NGOs and private sector perspectives, and to see how these are shaping strategies to achieve WEE and, also, what we ‘measure’. Hopefully the presentations will give us a good jumping off point to have a conversation about where we have reached in our collective understanding of WEE, and what we have learned from different experiences to date.

### **Overview of seminar and speakers’ introduction.**

And so, I am proud and privileged to present and to chair our three speakers for today.

**Dr. Elizabeth Daley**, Principal Consultant for Mokoro, will kick us off, and will speak about how land tenure and its governance contribute to women’s economic as well as broader empowerment based on her experiences in Africa and elsewhere. Dr Elizabeth Daley, who many of you will know, is a Mokoro Principal Consultant, and socio-economist working on issues around land, natural resources, agriculture and livelihoods with experience in Laos, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

Our second speaker is **Christine Svarer**, representing the ‘practitioner’ community Christine is Head of Women’s Economic Empowerment and Private Sector engagement for CARE International. Her presentation will reflect on CARE’s current reviewing of its strategy on women’s economic empowerment and how approaches to this around savings, access to finance and markets.

Finally, **Dr. Catherine Dolan** will speak directly about Corporate engagement in Women’s economic empowerment based on her experiences of research in Bangladesh, South Africa and Kenya. Catherine and I first met when we both worked at IDS in the 1990s – she on agricultural value chains in East Africa particularly in the horticulture sector. Currently, Catherine is a Reader in Anthropology at School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and Associate Fellow, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford.

We will first listen to each speaker for 15 minutes each. At the end of the presentations, we will have a few minutes (5-10 minutes) for questions of clarifications. We will then continue on to broader discussions, focused around some key themes/ issues emerging from the presentations.

- How do we understand women’s economic empowerment (WEE) and how does this relate to concepts of economic rights and economic justice?
- Which strategies are most promising in promoting women’s economic empowerment and under what conditions are they effective?
- What is the role and influence of the private sector in understandings of and supporting strategies for women’s economic empowerment?
- How does economic empowerment contribute to broader empowerment (in households, communities and politics)?
- How do different understandings translate into practices including measurement of outcomes?

## References

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- See also this blog on the article by Naila Kabeer: <http://feministeconomicsposts.iaffe.org/2013/12/19/esther-duflo-on-womens-empowerment-and-economic-development-a-must-read-for-feminist-economists/>
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## Websites and knowledge hubs

Girl Hub (DFID/Nike Foundation). <http://girlhub.girleffect.org>

The Grow. Sell. Thrive. site is a space for discussion and debate around Oxfam's Gendered Enterprise and Markets Programme including focus on Women's Economic Leadership. <http://growsellthrive.org/our-work/wel>

Knowledge Gateway on Women's Economic Empowerment. <http://www.empowerwomen.org>

Pathways of Women's Empowerment (IDS). <http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org>

RoadMap for Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment. <http://www.womeneconroadmap.org>